







THE BEST SHORT STORIES: 1935

*English and American*



# The Best Short Stories 1935

English and American



*Edited by*  
Edward J. O'Brien

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## Introduction

DURING the past year the British short story has been marking time. The level of competent technical achievement has been maintained, and this level is high. It is, in fact, considerably higher than the corresponding American level, but when this has been said, all has been said. An attentive reader is unable to find much evidence of striking new talent. Young English writers are not exploring life adventurously: they are content to record exquisitely their more placid emotional reactions to the texture of the life around them. The English short story is dozing in pleasant backwaters and has abandoned the main stream. There are signs of life in Birmingham, where a group of new writers hitherto unknown to each other have appeared during the past year. The novel reader will be familiar perhaps with the name of John Hampson, but Walter Brierley, Walter Allen, P. S. Chamberlain, and Leslie Halward are promising newcomers of whom we shall hear more in the next year or two. The social consciousness which informs the best contemporary American short stories begins to be perceptible in a few English novels, and perhaps the next year or two will make it apparent in the English short story. So far it is to be seen only in a few novels such as *Means Test Man* by Walter Brierley, *The Shipbuilders* by George Blake, *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood and *The Furies* by James Hanley.

The number of periodicals in which good short stories are to be found continues to shrink. *The London Mercury*, *Life and Letters*, and *New Stories* are perhaps the least unadventurous, but they leave something to be desired. Perhaps the root of the difficulty lies in the Englishman's inhibitions. He somehow fears that life, if lived fully, is in bad taste. He is suspicious of affirmation that is incapable of scientific proof, and he does not know quite what to believe. In fact, he is rather afraid of exploring life too thoroughly and prefers to mirror its more beautiful surfaces.

He dares not give his own heart away. I seem to perceive, for example, a reaction against Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence. On the other hand, he is meticulously anxious to be honest, and if he finds that he can only be honest in little things, he is faithful to these little things. He will not knowingly let you down.

The English public continues to be interested in American books and in American short story writers. The latest *Story Anthology*, for instance, has met little but adulatory comment, and the public response to such writers as Saroyan, Halper, Whit Burnett, William March, and Faulkner has been warm. In fact, London may be said to have had an American season. This hearty response to American writing is bound to have an influence on English writers, and I think we shall see signs of increased vitality in the English short story during the next year or two, as soon as this strong American influence has been more completely assimilated.

For the benefit of readers unacquainted with the earlier volumes of this series, I repeat here a brief summary of the principles which have governed my choice of stories. I have set myself the task of disengaging the essential qualities in our contemporary fiction which, when chronicled conscientiously by our literary artists, may fairly be called a criticism of life. I am not at all interested in formulæ, and organised criticism at its best would be nothing more than dead criticism, as all dogmatic interpretation of life is always dead. What has interested me, to the exclusion of other things, is the fresh living current which flows through the best contemporary work, and the psychological and imaginative reality which writers have conferred upon it.

No substance is of importance in fiction unless it is organic substance, that is to say, substance in which the pulse of life is beating. Inorganic fiction has been our curse in the past, and bids fair to remain so, unless we exercise much greater artistic discrimination than we display at present.

During the past year I have sought to select from the

stories published in English and American periodicals those stories which have rendered life imaginatively in organic substance and artistic form. Substance is something achieved by the artist in every creation, rather than something already present, and accordingly a fact or a group of facts in a story only attains substantial embodiment when the artist's power of compelling imaginative persuasion transforms it into a living truth. The first test of a short story, therefore, in any qualitative analysis is the measure of how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents. This test may be conveniently called the test of substance.

But a second test is necessary if the story is to take rank above other stories. The true artist will seek to shape this living substance into the most beautiful and satisfying form, by skilful selection and arrangement of his material, and by the most direct and appealing presentation of it in portrayal and characterisation.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN



*To*  
*DOUGLAS BOYD*



THE BEST SHORT STORIES: 1935

*English*





# Stanley Hutchinson

BY NUGENT BARKER

(From *Life and Letters*)

## I

WELL, Mr. Bidmead had a sow. And she waun't no ordinary sow, for all that she spent her time grunting and wallering in the mire: but there was something about those eyes of her'n, a sparkle, a 'by yer leave,' an 'after you,' as ain't gener'ly to be found in sties. And it was onny reasonable to suppose that these fine manners might reveal theirselves later on in the liddle porkers that were gathered around her when the story began: it was whispered all over the place how the fat things should ought to grow up into swine of a special grandeur, seeing that their father was hisself a well-mannered hog, though his ways were less dential than their mother's, I reckon. So one day-morning, Mr. Bidmead waun't terrible surprised when one of the liddle fellers, whose age at that time must a been somewhere in the neighbourhood of six weeks or thereabout, walked up to the cottage, poked his snout round the door-jamb, and offered him, in the perlitest manner possible, the time of day.

'Talkin',' said Mr. Bidmead. 'Now, ain't that very nice?' Whereupon he invited the liddle chap to dinner, and they got chatting and laughing together, and after an hour or so the old man asked him how his name was called, and it turned out to be Stanley Hutchinson.

'I knowed some Hutchinsons once, lived over in Chailey,' said Mr. Bidmead; 'big chep, five darters, lost his wife in a railway accident. Took on the "Green Cross" when her feyther died.'

"Tain't those Hutchinsons," said the liddle pig, turning up his snout; presently Mr. Bidmead brought out the elderberry wine; and from that day onward the old man did all that lay in his power to make that pig happy. Cooked him flour and water puddings; pushed up a rush-bottomed chair

for his own using; read him bits out of the daily papers, or kept him supplied with the current prices of pork. And at night time they'd have out the cribbage cards, or maybe the backgammon board, and the bottle of elderberry wine would stand betwixt um: then it was that Mr. Hutchinson, after a few glasses, would come up with the funniest tales that you ever heard, or astound that old man with some of his clever tricks with matches. And last thing of all, when their eyes were so sleepy that they didn't know whatsum-dever to do with um, they'd go slapping up to bed, and Mr. Bidmead would lay awake for whole hours listening to Stanley Hutchinson snoring in the room opposite his'n, for he was a lonely man.

There never was a more eddicated pig than Stanley Hutchinson; and people used to come on foot and on horse-back, in pony-traps and in farm-carts, from Houghton, and Madehurst, and Halnaker, and from beyond Ammerley, and from beyond Heyshott, to crack their jokes with him.

Now it came to pass, that what with the extra food and drink and other expenses, Mr. Bidmead found hisself one day at the end of all his money. The thought worried him, as you can imagine; looking towards Mr. Hutchinson, he couldn't hardly contrive to keep back his tears. So within three days he had decided that the onny thing to be done, the onny thing, was to go selling Stanley Hutchinson's relations for what they would fetch. Off he went to Tom Garrett, the carrier. 'Looke now, Tom Garr'tt,' said he. And so it was all arranged how the whole stock should be taken to Arundel in time for next market day.

Eh, dear oh me, that was a terrible sad parting. When Stanley Hutchinson larnt what was in the wind, he crept up to Mr. Bidmead's bedroom, and searched for a hankercher in a drawer: and by Job, there he found a golden coin, bright gold it was, with nicks upon it as sharp as new. And directly he see it, he thought how he'd like to swaller it, for in spite of all his eddication, in spite of his fine manners, in

spite of everything, Stanley Hutchinson at heart was nothing but a pig. And then his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give it a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and then he wrapped it up in the hankercher, and took it downstairs, and blowed his snout in the garden.

But he was a brave feller; and after a stroll or two up the paths, and over the flower-beds, he began to see how Mr. Bidmead's plan was all for the best. So he said to hisself: 'Looke, Stan, looke here, me pig, there's no hem use worritin' like a engineer'; and as soon as ever the old man had got his back turned, by Job, Stanley took his mother aside, and gave her the golden coin, telling her how it would keep her rich and contented during her last days—for she guessed exactly what was laid up for her in the time to come, surelye. With that, the old sow swallowed the golden coin, a sovereign it was, and good money; and when she turned back to the cart that was to take her and the children to Arundel, there was such an 'after you' look in her eyes that Stanley Hutchinson reckoned he hadn't ever felt so proud of her in his whole life. 'Gee up!' he cried. So the young porkers scrambled in first, while their brother looked up from the road and wished um good-bye.

'Goo'-bye, Elsie. Goo'-bye, Syd.' So it went round. 'Goo'-bye, Feyther. Give my love to Ethel.' For it was let on to the children how they were all going off to spend a few days with some cousins that they had never seen.

'Goo'-bye, Mother darlin',' said the liddle pig.

And so they all went away, and got killed.

## II

That evening, when Mr. Bidmead and the pig were half-way through their game of cribbage, they put up the cards, and turned their faces to the wood fire. "Tain't no go," said the old man softly, thinking of the fine mess that he had got hisself into; and after trying him with some clever tricks with matches, Mr. Hutchinson thought the same.

So they went to bed; and on the following morning it was no different: dull voices, flat feet, and looks that waun't no better than a rushlight. But just as he was passing Stanley the sweet whey butter, all of a sudden the old man give out a great cry, fit to blow the whole of Slindon village off the top of the hill.

'Why, by Job!' he hollered, 'if I bain't the biggest fool that ever was borned!' And with that, he started to walk up and down the parlour, now this way, now that way, up and down the parlour he walked, with his hands behind him, and his eyes growing rounder every minute.

'What's wrong with 'ee now?' asked the liddle pig.

'Hoy, there's nothin' wrong at all!' cried Mr. Bidmead, 'everything's right—eh, lawk-a-mussy-me!' he shouted, grinning from ear to ear, 'it queers me why I didn't think an't before!' Whereupon the old chap began to sniffle as loud as he could.

'I jest be g'wine to git a pocket-hankercher, Mus Hutchinson,' said he.

'There's nothin' like um,' said the liddle pig. But Mr. Bidmead onny sniffed the louder, strutted up and down the parlour, and winked as though he'd never stop. 'To git a pocket-hankercher,' he kept on repeating, clasping his bony hands together: and all of a sudden the old man couldn't keep it up a moment longer, but opened the door, and runned to his room as fast as the stairs would carry him; while Stanley put his trotters on the winder-sill, and watched the liddle sparrers as they played in the street.

There now, it waun't long before the old chap was down again, staring at nothing, and clenching his hands so that the knuckles gleamed.

'Wheer be my g-golden coin!' he whispered. 'Lawk-a-mussy-me, oh wheer be my g-golden coin!'

'What golden coin?' asked the liddle pig.

'Oh, Stanley, Stanley, wheer be my g-golden coin?'

'Which coin be that?' asked the liddle pig.

Yet nothing else would the old man say, but now and

again he moaned a bit, and give out a real snuffle, for he was very upset and had clean forgotten to git his pocket-hankercher. So Stanley took a turn in the garden, saying to hisself how the fresh air would do him a power of good. There he went snuffing the snowdrops and the pretty coloured crocuses, and reading out the linen labels that the old man had tied upon sticks; and when at last he had come to the far end, with its row of tall trees and the empty sty where his mother had reared him, he shook his head, and for ten whole minutes walked like an undertaker, to and thro', to and thro', beneath the wintry branches.

Now, that was market day at Arundel; but this here worriting had put it clean out of Mr. Bidmead's mind. 'Eh, by Job!' he hollered, all of a sudden. And with that, the old man began to put on his gaiters at a hem of a rate, and to call hisself all the lamentable hard names that he could think of. So it happened that by the time the liddle pig had wandered back to the house, Mr. Bidmead was hurrying down Slindon Hill on his way to Arundel, to attend the sale of Mr. Hutchinson's relations. Well, it waun't very long before Stanley guessed what was in the wind, so he fetched a paper, and set down in Mr. Bidmead's chair in the parlour, and spent his time figgering out the state of the pig market; but when Mr. Bidmead came home in the twilight, twitching his hands with excitement, and pulling in his lips so far that you couldn't see um, never a word did the old feller say, no, never one word, about the wunnerful prices that the hogs had fetched.

'I be middlin' rich,' he thought to hisself, 'I be middlin' rich.'

That night, for the first time, he spoke to Stanley Hutchinson about the missing coin, and the liddle pig went hunting all over the house to find where it had got to: 'Tis hem strange, wheer it can a' got to,' the pig murmured, nosing around. But Mr. Bidmead kept on thinking: 'I be middlin' rich . . . I be middlin' rich. . . .' Then he forgot how happy he was, and fretted like a miser for the lost coin.

## III

So the week went by; and although the weather suddenly changed, and early spring came to the beech woods of Slindon, there was always a nip in the evening air, when Mr. Bidmead, leaning forrard, threw another log on to the fire, and Mr. Hutchinson, leaning backard, watched in the flames the sparkle of his mother's eyes. And sometimes Stanley would let on to hisself that he could hear the sow's soft trotters in the room; and once he heard her gulp the golden coin, at a single swaller, without as much as a 'How did ye come by it, Stan?'

One morning, when Mr. Bidmead was out faggoting, the postman handed in a parcel, and the liddle pig opened it, being it was urgent. And by Job, there lay the golden coin, wrapped in a letter, and placed in a box; and the letter came from a butcher over in Parham, telling Mr. Bidmead how he'd found the sovereign in the sow's innards.

Now, Stanley waun't prepared for this; and first thing he done, he thought how silly the whole thing was, and how he'd better keep the coin for hisself, like, and burn the letter straightaway. And then he thought how glad Mr. Bidmead would be to see that coin back again, and all his worritings over. So he took it up to the old man's bedroom, and put it into the drawer: and there it lay, and there it shone and sparkled, until the liddle pig fancied that there waun't a thing to equal it but the sparkle of his mother's eyes. And then he thought how suspicious the old man would be, finding it back in the drawer again; all this time the coin was winking, and suddenly he thought how much he'd like to swaller it. And then his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give it a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and at that moment, by Job, who did he hear on the stairs but Mr. Bidmead. With that, he wrapped the sovereign in a hankercher, and took it across to his room; and there he blowed his snout, and there he

blowed it, and when he blowed his snout the second time he swallowed the golden coin.

So there it was; and that evening, when he had torn up the letter, and he and Mr. Bidmead were playing cribbage, his wits went wandering, to think how that coin would be his for evermore. 'Your play, Stanley,' said the pig's old friend. Coming out of his day-dream, the pig played a card; then he gazed into the fire, the fire put out its tongue at him, and young Hutchinson laughed.

For a long time after he'd swallowed the golden coin, Stanley Hutchinson did nothing but wink to himself all day and half the night. Then the weather became warmer, and in the evenings he and Mr. Bidmead used to chat and laugh together over a fire that waun't as big as it used to be in the winter-time: and whether it was for this reason, I don't rightly know, but although he blinked, and peered, and listened as hard as ever he could, the liddle pig waun't able to see the sparkle of his mother's eye no longer, or to hear the voice that had always seemed to grunt so favourably at the things he'd done. It is said, too, that the whole of the room began to rock a liddle behind his back, and that the old clock ticked its way clean into the middle of Stanley Hutchinson's soul. Later still, when spring began to change to summer, and the old man used to let the fire burn out entirely after the cooking was over, the dark chimbley *did* seem to be lighted up by a red glow of firelight, surelye: but the pig know how it waun't that at all, no fear, it was the golden coin that lay winking and burning in his innards.

So it went on, and Mr. Bidmead, kind old feller that he was, began to consarn hisself more than ever before with the comforts and pleasures of Mr. Hutchinson, bringing out the cribbage cards at all hours, and losing on purpose every mortal game that he put his hand to; fixing up the back-gammon board, and going at it hammer and tongs, whether the liddle hog wished it or no; laughing like a nigger at the tricks with matches; and fetchin in the elderberry wine

whensumdever the pig looked a liddle bit hipped in the eye.

And on top of this, by Job, Stanley discovered that his mother's eyes were beginning to sparkle again; but this time he could see um in the paraffin lamp that the old man had bought out of the pig-money, and in the patches of light that twinkled on the new cups and sarcers and plates of Chailey china; and sometimes, when the nights were very sleepy and hot, the old man would fall into a doze, with a smile upon his lips, and after a while his mouth would hang open, so that all of a sudden the room would fetch up with a snore as loud as a hog's. And at last Stanley Hutchinson couldn't abide it a moment longer. So one day near the beginning of June, he went to Mr. Bidmead, and gave it in how he would go searching for the lost coin.

'I justabout can't tell 'ee what makes me think so,' said the liddle pig, 'but I have an idea,' said he . . . 'I dunno but what,' he continued, 'I'll sure find that golden coin far, far away.'

Then the old man looked at him, and said:

'If so be as I thought there was any truth in these words o' your'n, Stan, why then, I reckon I'd tell 'ee to go and search for the coin, surelye. But how can a chap,' said the old man thoughtfully, 'go searchin' for a golden coin what he's never seen, what he's never knowed the date of, what he'd never even heard tell of before that morning many weeks ago when I runned upstairs to my bedroom for to git me a pocket-handkercher?' So he went on, talking and talking, and all the time he was thinking to hisself most miserably: 'Stan could tell me summat about that golden coin, I reckon.' For the pig didn't know that the butcher had written again from Parham, a month earlier, asking Mr. Bidmead why he hadn't acknowledged the liddle parcel. Mr. Bidmead had gone to the postman; and, hearing the most disturbing news that waun't entirely disconnected with Stanley Hutchinson, ever since that time the old chap had been beezled as to whether he should go prying further, for



fear he might bring the most terrible shame upon hisself and the liddle cottage. Eh, by Job, it was a frightening thought! Mr. Hutchinson! His own Stanley! The cleverest pig in the village! And now, looking down at his toes, then round the parlour, and again at the liddle pig, Mr. Bidmead reckoned all at once how it would be wiser to ask no tom-fool questions about the matter, being as he'd onny get perky answers or may be a few witty jokes that would leave him nowhere. So he said nothing. But he took a basket, and in it he put brown bread; and he put a pound of butter in it, and he put some cheese in it, and then he put some eggs in it, and then he put some salt and pepper in it, and a liddle elderberry wine, and then he put some apples in it, and then he said good-bye, and the pig went.

He went on a fine, blowy day in summer, and Slindon village knew him no more. Eh, dear oh me, how sudden it all was. And how they wondered whether he would ever come back. . . . But I can tell you a liddle of his journey; I can foller him as far as my eyes reach.

In spite of the wind, it was a very hot day, for it was a very hot wind; and by the time he had come to the bottom of Slindon Hill, lawk-a-mussy-me, the basket was empty, clean holler it was, and Stanley Hutchinson sat upon his haunches, lifted his snout, and set up a most dismal cry.

Well, there waun't nothing for it but that he must go begging, which he done, and so prettily, that by Job, he was able to get as much again as he had eaten, and he ate that too; and so it went on, until you couldn't have told him from a balloon-ball; and then he disappeared beyond the corner; and after that . . . he took hisself . . . I feel so certain sure . . . towards the place where they go killing and curing pigs. . . .

## IV

Now, that ain't the end of the story. It's no more the end of the story than this story is the end of the world. But the disappearance of Stanley Hutchinson was the end of Mr.

Bidmead, poor man. Two days after the pig had left him, the golden coin came back, and Mr. Bidmead couldn't hardly contain hisself for joy, but started to run from room to room of the liddle cottage, for it's a strange thing how much more pleased he was with the one sovereign than with all the money that he had got for the pigs. There was a bit of the miser in Mr. Bidmead, I reckon; yet no one can say that the old chap was selfish, and his eyes shone like gold when he thought to hisself: 'My Stan will be follering soon.' So he arranged a lot of surprises for his pig Stan. He bought some fish, and ice to keep it as fresh as a daisy; and he bought some eggs, and heaped um in a pyramid on a plate; and he give the elderberry wine a taste, to see if it hadn't turned a liddle; and he brought some roses from the garden, and stood um out in ornaments and jugs; and he shuffled all the cribbage cards, and even went so far as to shake the backgammon dice, ready for throwing; and the pig never came. That was in June. In July the old man couldn't hardly shamble up to his bedroom; in August he waun't no better than a clodpate; near the middle of autumn the villagers shook their heads over the fire.

'He had no ought to take up with a pig like Stan,' they muttered; 'that business has catched a holt of him, surelye.'

But bless ye, I disremember half the things they said of Bidmead, who onny put his fingers in his ears, like, and fared his own way. His clothes went to pieces, the garden grew, he ate where he would, never spreading the tablecloth; and his nose sniffled for want of a hankercher. One night he gazed oddly over the parlour; he kept on blinking his liddle pig-eyes as though he'd no ought to be there.

'Tis no use, hangin' on in this purty place,' he muttered; 'I just about don't remember what everything's for.' So he shuffled out of his chair; then, seeing the cribbage cards, put um idly into his pocket. Afterwards he turned out the light, and left the cottage for the last time.

The wind blew, and clouds rushed over the sky; the moon kept peeping out at shortish intervals, and during one of um

the old man put his hand into his pocket, and took out the golden coin. It was all he had left, the rest of his money was clean gone, and as he looked at it he thought how he'd like to swallow it. But the fag end of his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give the coin a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and with that, he went shuffling and padding to the bottom of the garden.

The wind was tossing through the trees. Sometimes it sounded like human laughter, and sometimes like the voices of all kinds of animals, from geese to elephants. The shape of the sty rose up before him; and when he opened the door, and peeped inside, he give a grunt of satisfaction.

'Gruntin',' said a liddle voice. 'Now, ain't that very nice?' And by Job, there was Stanley Hutchinson's ghost; and from that day to this, nobody never goes near the sty, nobody never goes near it, because of the voices that can be heard there, in the small hours, grunting and laughing together over the cribbage cards.

And if you don't believe this story, you ought to, and if you don't believe it, you can be no lover of pigs, and if you don't believe it, that's a pity; why, everybody in Slindon will tell you how it was all true. And maybe that's the onny virtue in it. For it ain't Shakspeare, by a long chalk, and it ain't Milton, and it ain't even Bunyan, though I suppose at a pinch it might be called the story of a Pig's Progress.

## *Beauty's Daughters*

BY H. E. BATES

(From *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*)

IT was a small two-storied farm-house built of brick the colour of sheep-reddle, with a wired-in yard of wooden cow-hovels roofed with corrugated iron that shone white-hot in the straight afternoon sunlight. It stood quite solitary on the rise of land, and without a sign of life; the yard empty even of chickens; the surrounding fields, divided up into set rectangles by fences of wire, empty of cattle; the treeless grass scorched brown under the fierce heat, and the sky empty of birds. As I went up the hedgeless cart-track of summer-baked mud towards the house I looked down at my shoes. They were covered with soft red dust, ironstone dust, the colour of the land all about me. Even the pasture was coloured red; the red dust seemed to be choking the thin brown grass. And then when I looked up again it seemed as if years of wind had blown a bombardment of dust against the house and that the bricks, and even the woodwork, had absorbed it. Beyond the red house the fields continued in bare undulations, scorched up, almost grassless, and beyond the land the sky was a fiery blue, without a shred of cloud. Nothing stirred and nothing seemed to be happening in the stillness of afternoon sunlight. All around the hills were just high enough to shut out the world.

Then when I reached the turn in the track that led into the farmyard I saw a movement beyond the house: the flap of a shirt-sleeve. A man was digging potatoes in a wired-in patch of ground between the house and a line of damson trees. Then as I began to walk across the yard I saw that the house door was open, with splashes of white hen-dung fresh on the threshold.

Then, looking at the man in the potato patch again, I saw something else. A red puff of dust, like the puff of a miniature cannon, rose up every time he dug. And as I went

closer I could see the dust, like a red blight, on the dark potato leaves, and on the man's boots, and on his black-green trousers.

I reached the wire and stood there, looking at the man digging. He did not see me. He was a tallish man, dark and very thin: thin straight body, and thinner splayed-out legs, like a split hay-rake. I could not see his face: only his thin back curved and straightened with each lifting of potatoes.

Then I spoke. 'Could I get something to drink here?' I said. 'Some tea?'

He looked up and round at once: though not at me, but at the house. Even then he did not see me. He stared at the house for a moment and then put his fork in the earth.

'Could I get something to drink?' I said.

He looked up again: but this time at me, startled, with astonishment. He stared hard, with a half-flicker of recognition in his eyes, as though he could not believe I were a stranger. His eyes were very brown: there was a mild, almost sweet look in them, inoffensive, almost childish. Then he saw that he did not know me, and the sweet mildness shot away and left him blank and uneasy.

I tried to reassure him: 'I only want a drink,' I said. 'Tea or something, or water.'

'I'll ask her,' he said.

His voice was so subdued that I scarcely heard him. And in a moment he was walking away across the potato patch and then across the yard and so into the house.

As I stood waiting for him I leaned back on the fence-wire and looked at the sun-scorched yard and the house. At once I saw why there was so little sign of life about the farm: a dog, a shepherd, lay asleep in the shade of a muck-cart, and the hens, ten or a dozen of them, all raw-necked, were huddled together in the thin shadow of a haystack, in scratched-out nests of dust and hay-seed, half asleep. And besides the man they seemed to be the only living things about the place. Under the still heat it seemed deserted and dead.

Then suddenly it came to life. A girl came half-running

out of the house to the yard-pump, with a water-bucket in her hands. She did not see me. She was a heavy, big-breasted girl, about thirty. She had nothing on but a white under-skirt and white skirt-top: no shoes or stockings or hat or corsets, so that I could see the coarse dirt-shiny soles of her feet as she ran, her black curl-pinned hair, and the great unsupported breasts flopping heavily under the thin skirt-top.

She hung the bucket on the pump-spout and began to work the handle. I could hear the pump sucking air in the short intervals between each motion of the squeaking handle. The water seemed a long time coming up, and finally after working the handle madly the girl desisted for a moment, out of breath. I could hear her muttering, and I could see even at that distance the sweat shining yellow on her coarse-fleshed face. Then after a moment she began to work the handle again; and again the pump sucked air and nothing happened, and once more she gave it up.

But this time her anger broke out in a shout.

'Dad! Dad!' She bawled as if he were on the opposite field-slopes. 'Dad! Christ Almighty. Where are you? Where the hell are you? Dad!'

Nothing happened. She began to pump again, the pump sucking air as before, she swearing. Every time she lifted her arm I could see the thick sweat-matted hair black under her arm-pits. In anger her face was sullen, passionate, the dark eyebrows close together. But there was one thing about her that was different.

I did not see it until I began to walk across the yard towards her. She had begun to push back her thick hair away from her face, as I came nearer, and I saw that she had lovely ears: small, lovely, soft-curved ears that shone very white against her black hair.

Then as I was looking at them and thinking that at any moment she must see me, she stopped pumping again and put her hand on the pump-head and drew herself up and looked down the shaft.

'The bloody pump's dry!' she shouted. The pump-shaft magnified the words, so that they rang out hollow and heavy and more blatant.

And they must have reached the house. For suddenly the man reappeared, half-running. 'All right, May, I'm coming,' he said. He kept repeating the words as he hurried across the yard to the pump.

'About time!' she shouted.

'What's up?'

'The bloody pump's dry.'

'All right, leave it to me. I'll see to it, May. I'll do it.' He spoke in a half-frightened voice, apologetically. 'All right, May, I'll do it. Leave it to me.'

'I tell y' it's dry!'

'All right, all right. I knowed it were running low.'

'But I wanna git washed!'

'All right, May, all right.'

He stood by the pump, tiptoe, and looked down the shaft.

'If we could git some water down it'd suck up,' he said.

'Well, git some, then, git some. Quick.'

'Ain't no water nearer'n Red Link,' he said.

'Christ.' She stood furious, clicking her tongue madly. 'And we wanna go out.' Then suddenly she seized the bucket. 'Christ. Give us the damn bucket. Come here. I'll wash in milk.'

She took the bucket, turned, and started to run back into the house. And turning, she saw me.

At once a miracle happened. By that time I was standing only seven or eight yards away from her, in a direct line between her and the house, so that she had to come past me. And seeing me standing there, looking at her, she was transformed. She shook back her hair with a gesture of almost timid quickness, a sudden and almost absurd act of modesty, as though she were scared at the sight of me. Then she put her free arm flat across her breasts so as to cover them. Then she set her lips straight and drew in her

breath and held herself almost primly. And she was looking at the ground until the moment of going past me.

She looked up for the fraction of a second as she went past. And she spoke.

'Good afternoon.' It was a soft, ladylike, quite gentle 'Good afternoon,' and the voice was so unlike the voice that had bawled across the yard that I was too astonished to speak. And she went on into the house.

The man was working the pump-handle in a series of quick motions, trying to suck up the water, as I reached him. But the sinker was still sucking dry and he gave it up when he saw me come.

'That's about the last on it,' he said. 'We're praying for rain.'

Then he remembered:

'Oh!' he said, 'she says it's all right. She'll put you up.'

For a moment I didn't say anything. I was tired, but I hadn't asked if they could put me up. Then I tried speaking very quietly, with my face half turned away.

'I asked about a drink,' I said.

The man gave no answer. Then I remembered that I must have been ten or twelve yards from him when I first spoke. And looking at his face I saw that it was a deaf face: it had the soft, touching, half-stupid look of quiet vacancy that the faces of the deaf have. It was responsible for the look of blank fear and the sweet mild expression in the dark eyes. It explained why he had come so slowly in answer to the girl and why he had misunderstood me.

And when I spoke again I raised my voice a little:

'All right,' I said. 'Thank you.'

'She's gitten' the room ready now.'

'All right. But can I have a drink?'

'Ain't no water,' he said, 'only milk. You don't fancy that, I expect?'

'Anything,' I said.

'I'll git it.'

He began to walk across the yard. Looking after him,



I saw something white moving at one of the bedroom windows. It was a girl: not the girl I had already seen, but another. She was combing her hair and watching me: combing the hair straight through, then tossing it back and then looking at the comb, all the time pretending she did not see me. Then she vanished behind the curtain, abruptly, as though she had been pulled there. And in her place I could see a woman: a big florid woman, like an older and fatter replica of the girl I had already seen. She took one look at me and vanished.

Before I could see who appeared in her place the man was calling from the door:

'I never thought. Come in. I never thought about you standing out there in the sun.'

I followed him into the house, through the front door and along the red-brick passage. The white and grey splashes of hen dung became mixed with bluish-white splashes of milk as I went further into the house, the trail following the bend of the passage, and finally at the foot of the stairs a great star-splash of milk lay on the bricks.

Just beyond the stairs the man stopped, his hand on a door-knob. 'You make y'self at home in here,' he said. 'She'll be down in a minute.'

He opened the door and I just had time to see a deal table covered with dirty dinner crocks before the man hastily shut it again.

'Huh!' he said.

He walked across the passage at once and opened another door. They were old-fashioned varnished doors, with comb-grained patterns and knots of sepia and gold. And for a moment, when the man pushed it, the second door stuck, as though the varnish had liquefied in the heat. Then it opened all of a sudden. And the man burst in.

'Better come in here,' he said.

Going in, I met the summer stale odour of the shut-up room coming out with a rush. It was stifling. Half-stupefied flies were crawling up the closed windows and on the var-

nished wall-paper and the oil-smoked ceiling and the pier-glass standing on the green plush-draped mantelpiece.

'She'll be down in a minute,' the man said. The words were like a chant of reassurance. I put my rucksack down on the oil-clothed floor. 'All right,' I said again, but he left the room hurriedly, without having heard. When he had gone I sat down and stared at the gramophone.

I could not help staring at it. Standing in the centre of the table, surrounded by black piles of records, its horn was like some great yawning ship's ventilator in blue and gold. Looking at it, I wondered and waited. Nobody came. Then I listened; and I could hear the clatter of crockery and then the bump of feet in the rooms above. Every now and then the bumps would increase, shaking the glass in the brass oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling. But still nobody came. And the room was intolerable. I began to separate the stale odours: odours of sun-stale air and sour milk and hens and then the softer odours of stale cigarette smoke and women's scent and women's clothes. At last I got up and walked round the room, looking at the cheap pictures on the walls and the tea-caddies on the cheap sideboard, all the stale paraphernalia of the farm-house front-room, seeing nothing to interest me until I came back to the gramophone and the pier-glass again.

Then I saw that the pier-glass frame was filled with all sorts of gilded and silver-lettered cards of invitation, stuck one above another: 'The Committee of the Oakwood Tennis Club request the pleasure of the company of Mrs. and Miss Rita and Miss May Thompson, at a Dance;' 'Lord and Lady St. John of Dean request the pleasure of the company of Mrs. and Miss Rita and Miss May Thompson, at the Servants' Ball.' 'Mrs. and Miss Rita and Miss May Thompson are cordially invited to . . .'

I was still reading the cards when the bumping began upstairs again. Suddenly it grew louder and nearer, and a second or two later the door opened and Mrs. Thompson came in.

'Good afternoon,' she said. 'Do please excuse me.'

It was the same ladylike, put-on voice with which the daughter had murmured her almost timid 'Good afternoon' as she hurried past me into the house. And the mother was like the daughter: the same florid body, with the big breasts, the heavy-fleshed passionate face, the black rope-thick hair. An odour of flesh and violets rushed in with her, half driving away the sun-staleness of the room. And she was dressed all in white: white shoes and stockings and a dress of white silk that stretched skin-tight over her big breasts and hips, leaving her arms bare to the shoulders. She was an imposing woman, and there was no doubt that once she had been a beauty. Now she looked like a fat white pigeon.

'That's all right,' I said.

'I'll take you up to see your room,' she said.

She opened the door and I followed her across the milk-splashed passage and up the oil-clothed stairs, carrying my rucksack. Going up behind her I could see nothing but her fat white back and her tight-clothed heavy hams straining and quivering with the exertion of climbing. It was only when she turned the bend in the stairs at the top that I could see her face; and I saw then that she had the same little, soft-shaped white ears as the daughter.

A minute later we stood in the bedroom. White bed, white-washed stand, blue ivy growing on white wall-paper: ~~it seemed~~ all right.

'It's all right,' I said. 'But what I want most is a drink. Some tea.'

'I'll do my best,' she said. 'But the water is running out. We're praying for rain.'

I thought for a moment of asking her when she prayed for rain, and how, and how often, but she went on:

'How long will you stay?'

'I shall be away to-morrow morning,' I said. 'Early.'

'The room will be eight-and-six,' she said.

She kept fingering the silver locket-chain where it touched her breast.

'What does that include?' I said.

'Everything.'

'It's more than I wanted to pay.'

'It includes everything.'

I stood in thought. What did she mean by everything?

'It includes a good supper and a good breakfast,' she said.

'And tea?'

She hesitated. Then:

'Yes, and tea.'

'All right,' I said.

I dropped my rucksack on the floor. She still stood waiting. All the time she was the lady, speaking with that put-on aristocratic voice that nevertheless had something in it faintly hostile. And still the lady, but a little more hostile than before, she said:

'Could I ask you to pay for the room in advance?'

'It isn't usual.'

She smiled by merely pressing her lips together, so that they widened a little, but without opening. All the time she kept up the ladylike fingering of the locket on her bare breast.

'I don't know you,' she said.

'You don't think I shall run off without paying?' I said.

'Oh no! Not that.'

Then what? I said nothing. It was a deadlock. And there we stood: she the ladylike white pigeon, fingering her locket, I looking straight at her, for some reason uneasy, not speaking only because I did not know what to say.

And then the door opened. It burst open abruptly and the young daughter was in the room before either the mother or I could move.

'Rita!'

'I'm sorry, mother.'

'What do you want coming into the gentleman's room?'

'Nothing.'

'Don't be so silly. What do you want? Haven't I brought you up better than that?'

'A handkerchief.'

'Where do you keep them?'

'In the second drawer, mother.'

The mother strutted across the room to the chest of drawers and opened the second drawer. While she was finding the handkerchief I took one look at the girl. She seemed about nineteen, and as she stood there, with her bright red dress and black hair showing up against the white bedroom door, the hair curled back away from her small white ears, I thought she looked lovely. Later she would run to fat, acquire that same grossness as her sister and mother, but now she was delightful, her sallow face plump but delicate, her breasts firm and sweet as oranges, her naked arms smooth and pinky white, like barked willow. And there was a kind of sulky hauteur about her, only half-conscious, a kind of natural immobile contempt, as if to say, 'Damn you, who do you think you are? And who are you staring at?'

In another moment the mother was hustling her out of the room. 'Now you know better than that in future. Here's your handkerchief,' and so on. I could hear them going downstairs, the mother's voice purposely raised in reprimand so that I could hear it.

And the mother did not come back. I began to unpack my things, and then, all of a sudden, I heard the long ripping shriek of a car hooter. After the first long shriek there were two or three shorter jerked hoots, and then a longer one, and then the short ones again.

I went to the window and looked out. The car was standing down on the road, at the end of the cart-track. Two men were in it: one was sitting in the driving seat pressing the hooter-button, the second was standing up. He was whistling with his fingers in his mouth. The man sitting down had his hair cut with long side-linings that came low down on his cheeks. Every now and then the other would cease whistling and shout something and wave his hand. They were wearing straw hats.

In about another minute the three women, the two daughters first, and then the mother, floundering behind, began to run across the farm-yard and down the cart-track. They were dressed up to the nines, flashily, and as they ran the man on the hooter played short excited notes of encouragement. The mother, floundering behind, very soon ceased running and began to walk. She was still walking down the cart-track long after the two girls had reached the car and were sitting inside, laughing with the men at the sight of her floundering and stumbling in her white high-heeled shoes down the wheel-rough track.

Finally, the men ceased hooting and calling and began to clap her, as though she were coming in from a race. They were all hilarious and friendly by the time she reached the car, and when the car began to move down the road I could see her sitting on the knees of the man behind, laughing and giggling with her head thrown back and her mouth opened like a fat contralto.

It was strangely silent when the car had gone. The farm seemed to recapture abruptly the deadness of the hot afternoon. I could feel the silence of the house and the fields about it: a scorching August silence, without wind or birds.

I went downstairs at last to find the tea the woman had promised me.

The house was deserted. A cup and saucer and a plate had been laid on the front-room table by the gramophone, there was no teapot and no milk or sugar.

I went outside to look for Thompson. The yard was deserted too. I called once, but no one answered.

And then suddenly I saw Thompson. He was coming over the brow of the nearest field, carrying two water-buckets on a sway-tree. He began to quicken his pace a little when he saw me and he was spilling the water rapidly over his legs and boots when he came into the yard.

'Ain't y'ad no tea?' he said.

'No,' I said.

'They gone?'

I told him they must have been going as he came across the field. Hadn't he seen them? He was silent. Already he had set down the buckets by the pump; now he picked them up again and began to walk towards the house, motioning me with his head to follow him.

In the house Thompson boiled the kettle and I got some tea about half-past six. He scarcely spoke to me while he was getting the tea. Dumb embarrassment seemed to govern all his movements, and I scarcely spoke myself, partly because I could see he was troubled, partly because I was afraid always of his not hearing me.

The sunlight was going rapidly, but it was still hot and more than ever silent when I went out into the farmyard again. Thompson was still carrying water. He was filling a wooden cattle tub that stood by the kitchen door. He must have made by that time half a dozen journeys with the sway-tree, and the tub held less than a foot of water.

'If you'd got another yoke and the buckets,' I said, 'I could give you a hand.'

'You rest,' he said.

'I'm rested. I haven't come far.'

'What d'ye call far?'

'Twenty miles.'

He stared at me. I could see that he thought it a great distance, that I had come from somewhere beyond his world.

'Go on,' I said, 'let me help.'

'You couldn't manage the yoke,' he said. 'You rest.'

'I learnt to carry a sway-tree,' I said, 'when I was so little the buckets dragged along the ground.'

'Ah?'

He stood a moment longer, considering. Then he seemed to accept me.

'You take this,' he said. He set the sway-tree across the buckets. 'I'll git another.'

So we began to make the journeys across the field together, to fetch the water. The spring came out of the hillside beyond the brow of the first fenced-in field, and the earth was

so red there that the water seemed, at first sight, to gush out like watery blood. But in the buckets it was wonderfully clear, like ice. We went on making the journeys for more than an hour. It was a short journey, simply past the potato patch and across the field and half-way down the hill, but it seemed long sometimes because, from first to last, Thompson never spoke a word. He just walked and stared at the sky. Then when he did speak it was to repeat himself, like someone nervous. 'How far did you say you come? How far did you say you come?' And then I would tell him again, raising my voice a little for fear he had not heard. 'Twenty miles.' And once I said, 'Twenty miles. From Langford up through Dean and Nassingham.'

'Nassingham?' he said at once. 'You come through Nassingham?'

'Yes.'

'That's where I were married,' he said. 'That's where she comes from.'

Gradually, after that, he talked a little more, but still repetitively, as though nervous of himself or me.

'What's it like now, Nassingham? What's it like? Changed, I expect. I ain't been down there for ten year. I reckon it's bigger?'

Then he would stop talking of the town, and talk of the weather. At the spring or by the cattle-tub, after he had set the buckets down, we always stood for a moment and looked at the cloudless sky, a dark tawny yellowish-blue at the horizon edge. Then as we made more journeys it seemed to grow hotter and more oppressive. I could feel the sweat running in warm trickles down my back. And finally Thompson said:

'Might be some thunder about. God, we ain't had a drop for three weeks, not for three weeks.'

It was after eight o'clock before we made the last journey and the water-tub was full. I was hungry, and glad when Thompson said:

'She say anything about your supper?'



'Yes. We arranged it,' I said. But I knew that whatever supper I had he would have to get. And I went on: 'I'll have mine when you have yours. That's all right.'

'I'm goin' have mine now. You sit and rest. I'll call you.'

Half an hour later we sat together in the kitchen and ate fried eggs and thick fat bacon and drank big cups of strong tea. Thompson hardly spoke and I was relieved when it was over and we went outside again.

'I got to shut the chicken up,' he said.

After we had shut the chicken-house we sat outside the front-door, Thompson on a sawing-horse, I squatting on the doorstep. With the falling dusk odd fowls were beginning to cry across the silent fields, the only sound in the hot air. There was no wind: the only trees, the old damson trees beyond the potatoes, drooped their scorched leaves, half-dead, in a stillness that was almost ominous. The world seemed in suspense. It seemed as if the thunder must come up with the darkness.

We sat there for a long time, keeping up a kind of vigil while the twilight thickened and deepened, our eyes fixed alternately on the sky and the darkening fields.

'It ain't been so bad as this since I bin here,' Thompson said. 'Never had to carry water afore. They reckon it were as bad nineteen-'leven, but that were a year afore I come. But I never remember it as bad.'

Once I asked him how large the farm was, and he said:

'Near enough eighty acres. Pretty near all grass. It gits a-top on me. I only got a man and a boy.'

'You've got your daughters,' I said.

That began it. It was as though the remark had touched a hidden spring in him. He almost turned on me:

'What good d'ye think they are? Eh? What good d'ye think they are?'

I couldn't answer. He answered for me.

'Nothing! Not a damn thing. *You* see how it is, don't you? Anybody can see how it is! You can see, can't you?'

'Yes.'

'You know why she put you up?'

'No.'

'That's her idea—wants to make a damn boarding-house of the place. Tennis court. Tables in th' orchard. She was a servant in a boarding-house before she married me—down in Nassingham. That's how I met her.'

'Would it pay?' I said.

'Eh? Would it what?' Then the echo of the word seemed to reach him. 'Pay? That's all she thinks about. Money. Pay. Money to throw about. And she's bringing the gals up like it too—money, tearing about, men, drink, everything. They used to be nice kids. Now look at 'em.'

He would go on like this for several minutes, talking in his soft husky voice, almost to himself, pouring out to me all the grievances pent up in him by time and solitude. And then suddenly he would break off, as though too exhausted and disgusted to go on, or as though he were uncertain of my confidence. After the nervous sound of his voice the silence seemed profounder than ever, the air more oppressive and hushed. Every moment it seemed that the thunder must come, but the air never stirred and the silence was never broken except by Thompson's voice going on in bitter complaint again.

'They gone off somewhere to-night. Dancing. A booze-up somewhere. I shan't see them gals till four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. They'll stop a-bed all day. What d'ye think o' that? That's a nice damn thing, ain't it?'

'Why don't you do something?' I said.

He was silent. I thought for a moment that perhaps he hadn't heard me, and I repeated the words. But he still kept silent. He sat staring at the ground, in thought, dejected.

And finally when he did speak he said:

'What could I do?'

I didn't know what to say to him. What could he do?

'I tried all ways,' he said. 'She never lets me speak to 'em. I don't have to say half a word afore she's down on me. As if they never belonged to me.'

So, gradually, from what he said and from what he didn't say, I began to see that somewhere there was a fundamental weakness in him: a lack of aggression, of spirit or vindictiveness, something hard to define, a little crack of gentleness running right across his nature. All his anger and bitterness was shadowy: shadowed over by his affection for the two girls. Underneath he was heartbroken. Whenever he spoke of the daughters that unconscious tenderness for them asserted itself, softening his voice and his rage.

'I told her she wanted to make street women on 'em,' he said, 'tarts, and she's done it. That's what she's done. And she's as bad. Worse. I don't know what I shall do. But one o' these days I shall do summat. I shall do summat. I waited long enough.' He was trembling.

We sat up till nearly midnight. There was no sign of rain. Long after I was in bed I was woke up by the sound of voices under the window.

'Don't be silly. You can't come up.' It was the younger daughter's voice. 'You can't.'

'Why not?'

'He's there. I told you. A boarder.'

'Boarder. Huh. Can't I come in at all? Rita! Rita!'

Then silence; and then softly again, 'Rita, Rita!' until the words changed to mere whispers and the whispers at last to silence.

In the morning it was six o'clock by the kitchen clock when I came downstairs. The kitchen door was open, but the place seemed deserted. I waited about in the kitchen for a time, but no one came, and finally I went into the front room, wondering if breakfast had been laid there for me.

There was no breakfast. Gramophone records lay strewn about the table, and the room was sour. And suddenly I saw the girl, Rita, lying asleep, still in the red dress, on the sofa under the window.

I went out again and into the kitchen, and then I noticed a teapot standing on the dresser, and by it a cup with tea dregs in it. The pot was warm, and I found myself a cup

and poured out the tea and then drank it standing up, staring out of the window at the sunshine on the yard outside. The air was as hot as ever and beyond the yard the scorched fields stretched out parched and dewless, the sky beyond them as clear as glass.

Finally, when I had finished the tea I put eight-and-six on the table and went outside. The Sunday morning world seemed empty except for Thompson's hens pecking round a stack of early wheat. I waited about for a time but nothing happened, and at last I began to walk away.

Then, half-way down the cart-track, I saw Thompson. He was standing in the field across which we had journeyed with the water. He was standing on the brow of the field, quite still, staring away from me, towards the sun. I called him. 'Hi! Mister Thompson.' Nothing happened. He did not move. Then I called again. 'Thompson. Hi! Mister Thompson.' But still nothing happened. Then I realised that he could not hear me, and at last I began to walk on, slowly, turning at intervals and watching him in case he should turn too.

And when, far down the road, I turned and looked back, he was still standing there. He stood with a slight droop of the shoulders, like someone partly in dejection and partly in hope, his eyes fixed on the distance, as though he were waiting for something: for the chance of a cloud, for rain, for something altogether beyond his control and perhaps beyond his understanding.

# *The Song of the Scythe*

BY DOUGLAS BOYD

(From *Life and Letters*)

## I

ON the grassy wayside, dividing the dusty road from the hawthorn hedge, the mower pauses for a moment, resting on the long curved handle of his scythe.

He is rather short, but well built. His shoulders have an extraordinary breadth, and the muscles of his broad hairy chest ripple as his body sways with smooth, measured motion upon his hips. The knees of his trousers are tied with thick string, making the bottoms bell-mouthed over his heavy boots. From a shirt rolled high above the elbows his arms thrust out, long and muscular as an ape's. His features, coarsened by wind and rain, darkened by the sun, are not ill-looking, and his chin is square and his eyes are a merry blue.

The sun beats down heavily on his uncovered head. His brow shines with sweat. Traffic on the road passes him, but he gives no heed to it, though clouds of dust swirl about him and settle like white powder on him and on the mown grass and nettles. From over the hedge come the sound of a binder in the corn-field, the dull thud of horses' hooves, the rattle of harness, the hoarse cries of the driver.

In the gutter a tramp stops to pick up a cigarette-end, peers at it for a second beneath bushy eyebrows, then secretes it carefully in his ragged coat. The mower straightens his back and re-sharpens his scythe, throws the tramp a careless glance, and turns afresh to his task. His strong arms swing the blade in steady, half-circular sweeps, his body swaying with it, his blue eyes following the pointed tip. It cuts through the long grass and sings as it cuts. *Sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a*. And as it sings, he sings with it in a pleasing voice:

‘Old Man Time he hath a scythe,  
He cuts both short and long. . . .’

The long blade flashes. *Sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a.* Dark, stray poppies, coloured cups upturned to the sky, stagger, fall backward over the steel and lie like blood upon the ground.

‘With horny hand he takes his tithe,  
And sings the mower’s song.’

*Sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a.* He works gradually toward a group of elms, reaches them, and continues beneath the cool shade their leafy arms throw upon him and over the road behind him.

At the sound of his voice a rook caws loudly, flutters its wings in the topmost branches, and flaps away to a neighbouring copse. A small twig topples and falls in an almost silent passage downwards, and taps him smartly on the head. He brushes it off sharply, and as he does so turns to the road. A stoat, its neck well-arched, its sleek body so fair as to be nearly the colour of the dust, is crossing from the other side. A slight excitement fills him, his nostrils twitch, and with a new and deadly purpose he raises his scythe a few inches above the ground; then crouching a little, he watches the animal’s queer, noiseless movement, and the muscles of his arms become taut.

Reaching the verge the stoat vanishes into the grass. The mower waits, listening to the creeping body as it nears him. Like a stab of light the blade suddenly sweeps along the surface, shearing grass and faded hemlock, laying bare the brown earth. But the flash and the leap are as one. There is a slight rustle in the field beyond and then silence.

That silence is shattered by his sudden roar of laughter. He shakes a formidable fist in the direction from which the last faint rustle came. Stooping quickly, he picks up a stone and throws it with great force over the hedge. It cuts

through the still-standing corn with a swish like that of his scythe, but the aim is hurried and uncertain, a reluctant admission of defeat. With a sharp metallic ring stone strikes on stone, but far beyond its reach the stoat has paused, its swiftly panting belly low upon the ground.

Thirty yards away the grass-covered waste land beside the road runs down into a deep hollow, screened by bush and bramble. The earth has been beaten down by many feet, and here and there are evidences of many a wood fire: little bits of charred twig and large round patches of grey ash. An old coat, torn and frayed, is rotting where it has been carelessly thrown, and one old boot bears it company.

The tramp has vanished from the road. He has filled a tin with water from the stream in the ditch on the other side, and in the hollow he is stooping over scattered ashes, arranging charred twigs and adding a few dry sticks. Everything to his satisfaction, he stands up, his dirty fingers wandering through his coat. He has a look of perplexity, and he rubs a stubby jaw with a grimy forefinger.

The mower has picked up his scythe and is examining the point. Having made sure that it has suffered no damage, he draws a whetstone from his trouser-pocket and once more sharpens the shining blade.

'Have you a match you can a-blige us with?'

He turns sharply. The tramp is standing barely three paces away, his approach having been almost as soft as that of the creeping stoat. Without a word the mower throws him a box of matches, and with a muttered 'Thanks' the tramp returns to the hollow. Thin coils of white smoke begin fitfully to rise above the tops of the bushes.

The clatter of the binder has ceased and a strange quiet has settled on the land. From north and south and east and west, over hill and valley, comes the striking of church clocks, sounding one after another, as if impish hands had mischievously set them in motion. Picking up his jacket from beneath a tree, the mower leisurely turns toward the hollow. The tramp's face is expressionless as he returns the

match-box; although only two spent matches lie upon the ground, at least a third of the contents has gone.

But the mower is in good humour. Shaking the box to indicate his knowledge of the theft, he laughs boisterously, turns around like a huge dog seeking a resting-place, and throws himself on the ground beside the fire. From one capacious pocket he produces a brown paper parcel containing half a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese, and from another a bottle of beer. The tramp pretends to ignore these preparations of his uninvited guest. He thrusts his hand into his coat and draws forth a small grease-proof packet. Taking out a thick slice of white bread he shoots the rest of its contents, a number of bacon bits, into the large flat lid of a toffee tin and pushes it into the fire, where the water in the other tin is already boiling. Into the little cloud of steam he pours a small, measured quantity of tea leaves, and stirs them with a thin stick. The bacon begins to sizzle in the lid. Its aroma rises with that of the beer, is wafted over the hedge and mingles with the scent of honeysuckle.

The mower leans back upon his jacket, drinking his beer and eating his bread and cheese; the tramp reclines among his tins, the abandoned boot and scraps of old papers scattered about him, drinking his tea and eating his bread and bacon bits. The flames of the wood fire are vague and shimmering in the heat of the mid-day sun.

## II

The tramp gazes meditatively at the crackling twigs.

'It was a very cool thing to do.'

'What?'

'The stoat,' says the tramp briefly.

'What about it?'

'What you did.'

'I tried to kill it,' says the mower.

'Why?'

'Oh . . . I don't know . . .' the mower drawls lazily. 'It's



not the first time I've killed a stoat that way. And not only stoats, neither. Rats, too, and field-mice.'

'Why?' persists the tramp.

'Why not?' parries the other.

'They do *you* no 'arm. An' that way, too.' There is a faint tinge of scorn in his voice.

'Don't you be so squeamish. I guess you've snared a rabbit and knocked it on the head, more than once.'

'I ain't never snared no rabbit. When yer live like I do, out in the open all the time, yer get ter kinder like wild things. They're like *you*, yer see. Out in the open all day an' night, wiv not a soul ter care about yer. Got ter live the best way yer can, an' find yer own food—or starve. They live out in the same woods, sleep in their holes under the same stars an' sky, an' warm themselves in the same sun, an' shelter under the same wet leaves. I don't want no rabbits ter eat, or ter kill stoats fer nothin'. I buy twopenn'orth o' bacon bits—when I can.'

'Everything's got to die sometime or another,' jeers the mower; and begins to sing:

'Old Man Time he hath a scythe,  
He cuts both short and long. . . .'

'That's old Tiggs's song,' he goes on. 'He's mowing a mile or more further down the road, near my cottage. It's his song; leastways, he sings it, and he may have wrote it for all I know. He taught me it years ago, he did, when he first showed me how to handle a scythe.'

'God the growing, he the mowing,  
The good un's and the wrong.'

But the tramp has finished; his power to express views on the cruelty of taking life unnecessarily is exhausted. From a hidden corner in his coat he extracts a few cigarette-ends. Turning them over in his palm he chooses the longest, to

which he holds the glowing end of a twig from the fire, and puffs it into life. Contentment steals over his face as he picks up a sheet of an old newspaper. . . .

The mower leans back against the bank and closes his eyes. . . .

From over the fields a distant clock strikes the hour of two—its chimes are faint once more; the agitated chatter of the rooks greets the binder as it clatters its way toward them; beyond the bushes and the bramble and the slender leafy saplings, high up on the road and amid its cloud of dust, a motor hums and passes. The mower stirs and opens his eyes to the blue sky above him, and the smell of earth and grass and sorrel assails his nostrils. He rises with a yawn, lifting his closed fists high above his head; then, gathering up his jacket and his scythe, he climbs up from the hollow and makes for the tall elms beneath which he left off mowing.

Beside the dying fire, its wreaths of white smoke gently swaying upward, the tramp has already bestirred himself. Picking up the old boot he inspects it carefully. The upper, with the exception of the toe-cap, has been cut away, but the sole and heel are serviceable. Holding it in his right hand he uses it as one would a stick, pushing aside the tall grass and nettles and peering among the bushes. With a grunt of satisfaction he espies its fellow in the bramble and, withdrawing it, finds it cut down in the same way. They are like a pair of clogs. He glances at his own boots with sudden distaste, and seating himself upon the bank removes them, thrusting his toes into the toe-caps of the others. They seem to fit. They are more comfortable—like slippers. They look better. A slight vanity stirs within him. He stamps this way and that. He is pleased.

The mower has started again . . . *sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a . . . sweesh-a . . .* a pace at a time, his body swinging with perfect rhythm. Far into the afternoon he works, unceasing, until the verge is almost shorn of its covering, and the sinking sun

spreads a soft warm glow over the face of the earth. He takes the whetstone from his pocket and with quick strokes draws it up and down the blade. But suddenly he stiffens, his body leaning slightly forward. He hears not the dull thud of hooves, not the driver's hoarse 'Whoa!' For, disturbed by the rattle of the binder, a startled rabbit has left the corn. Unaware of the mower, it has flashed through the hedge and taken cover in the remaining tall grass on the verge. Breathing gently, it creeps through as did the stoat, but it is bigger and the tops of grass and poppy and nettle sway at its approach.

Now the scythe does not sing. It is like the hiss of a snake. The sweep is wide and long-reaching, the plunge of it almost unbalancing. A small, sharp cry of agony—and the poppies among the shorn grass show sudden scarlet beside the real red blood.

The feat delights him. His blue eyes shine and he laughs happily as he lays down the last of the grass with a few quick strokes. Then, wiping his blade and whetting it sharp and clean again with the stone, he hoists it over his shoulder with his jacket through the stay, picks up the rabbit by its soft, slender body, and steps down into the hollow.

Well, the tramp's a sham, a liar. He'd been in no hurry to leave—was here a few minutes ago. Will the chap be too squeamish to accept a rabbit when it's offered to him? . . .

But the tramp has vanished. Beside the grey ashes lies a pair of discarded boots, old and cracked and shapeless.

Quickly he runs up to the road, but the tramp is nowhere in sight. His cheery 'So long!' to the binder's driver, whose head appears above the hawthorn hedge, brings forth a husky response. He walks with a steady stride, his eyes searching the road ahead, until, a quarter of a mile away, he sees his cottage. The tramp has just reached it. The mower hastens, but the tramp, after a slight hesitation, passes. Beyond the cottage, too, is Tiggs, the old hand, still mowing with his steady, practised stroke. His voice comes softly over the distance:

'Old Man Time he hath a scythe,  
He cuts both short and long. . . .'

A sudden interest is kindled in the eyes of the mower. Something is happening, something unexpected—strange. His wife has appeared in the doorway, and another woman, too, trying to restrain her. But his wife thrusts her aside and rushes forward to meet him. Her face is white, her eyes are hard.

He looks at her with wonder.

'The child,' she says stonily. 'The lorry ran over her legs and she's dead.'

But the mower sees her not, nor old Tiggs either, nor the tramp beyond, slouching along the gutter in his rags. A little breeze rustles like a ghost along the hedgerows, gently bearing with it the song of the scythe:

'Both high and low must take the blow,  
The weak un's and the strong.'

Transfixed, he is staring stupidly at the furry, dangling legs of the rabbit in his hand.

# Terminus

BY ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL

(From *Life and Letters*)

SHE sat down on the horse-shoe bench, pinchfaced and demure. Her feet swung clear of the ground. She tucked her hair behind her ears, drawing the backs of her fingers through it. The grey-haired man brought over a tankard of stout and a whisky and set them on the table before her.

He smiled. She looked at herself in the mirror of her bag and pursed her lips.

The grey-haired man went back to the bar and fetched a midget bottle of soda.

'Say when,' he said.

She patted the air, meaning 'when.'

He bent forward, hands on knees, peering at her through his spectacles; and head cocked slightly left, he said, 'Won't you have something to eat?'

'No, thanks.'

'A ham sandwich?'

'No, thank you.'

'Have a bun, then; a chelsea bun?'

She nodded her head, no.

'They've got very nice sausages.'

'No, thank you.'

'Well,' he said, standing up straight, 'I'm going to have a sandwich. Are you sure you wouldn't like something?'

She smiled and nodded her head from side to side.

The man went back to the bar and got his sandwich. Then brought it and sat down beside her. He took a bite of it and said, 'You ought to have some of this; you really ought. It's got mustard in it. Let me give you half.'

'I don't want it,' she said, and sipped her whisky.

'You'll be there in two hours' time. Charley'll be waiting for you, at the station.'

'I know he will,' she said. 'I know Charley. You always seem to forget I know him.'

'Charley's nice. He's a bit dull, but he's straight.' The grey-haired man drummed a tune on his knee with the fingers of his right hand. 'He's not clever, but he'll make a good husband and a fine father. Have a sardine on toast?'

'No, thanks.' She took a cigarette from a case in her bag and, while he fumbled for matches, lit it from a mother-of-pearl lighter.

'That's a good lighter I gave you,' he said. 'It's lasted well. A damn nice lighter, that is.' He took it from her and felt it in his fingers.

'You can have it back, if you want,' she said. 'I know Charlie, he's straight. He's a gentleman. His mother must have been a fine woman.'

'Haven't I told you? She was the finest woman I ever knew,' he said. 'I wasn't fit to unlatch her shoes.'

She picked tobacco shreds from her lip with the nail of her little finger; then said, 'I can't think why she married you.'

'Nor can I.' He raised the tankard and half-drained it. Then said, 'You're not sore, are you? You don't bear malice. I mean, Charley's not half bad when you know him.'

'He's the finest man I know,' she said. 'I'm proud of Charley. With that ten pounds a week he'll get the Radio shop going. He'll be a changed man.'

'I can't bear to think of you not having anything to eat,' he said. 'Why not try a tomato sandwich. The girl'd make it, if I asked her. She's a friend of mine.'

'No, thanks; I don't want it.' She finished her whisky.

'I really believe you bear malice,' he said.

'I'll have another whisky.'

He got up and went to the bar. She leant forward, covering her face with her hands.

Looking from the bar, he saw her. 'Make it a small one,' he said. 'She's had about enough.'

As he came back, she looked at her watch. 'There's plenty of time,' he said. 'Mustn't miss the train, though.'

She poured out the rest of the midget soda. As she sat back, hands crossed on her lap, she grew rigid and shivered from the shoulders downwards.

'You'd have time for a macaroon, if you fancied one,' he said, drumming on the table. His fingernails were too long. 'I don't.'

'You won't tell him about us, will you? It wouldn't do any good. It'd only make him unhappy. And he won't think it strange. He's always been asking for that money.'

'D'you think I'd tell him about me? What sort of fool d'you think I am?'

'I knew you wouldn't tell him. Course I knew. He won't suspect anything, see. As long as you don't bear malice.'

'We best be going,' she said, looking at the clock.

'I'll see you off,' he said. 'I can get a platform ticket. It'll be no trouble.'

They finished their drinks and stood up. She had a large suitcase and a patent leather dressing-case. He took the large case and they walked on to the platform.

The train stood ready.

'There're not many people,' he said, 'not at this time of night. I'll find you a corner seat, easy.'

He got one in a third-class smoker, went in and stowed her cases on the rack.

She stood on the platform, waiting to get in. He stepped out and took her in his arms. 'Kiss me before you go,' he said.

She stood stiff as a pole. He kissed her on both cheeks. 'Kiss your future father-in-law,' he said, laughing.

She stepped past him and into the carriage. Sat down in the corner seat by the window, drawn up all small.

He put his head in and said, 'Charley'll be waiting for you at the station with the van.'

She didn't seem to hear.

The guard blew his whistle and waved his flag. The engine whistled and began to snort. The train got under way.

He fumbled in his overcoat pocket to get something out, running alongside the carriage meanwhile. The train gathered speed. He pulled the parcel from his pocket and threw it in at the window.

She didn't look at him nor wave good-bye.

Through his cupped hands, he shouted at the receding door, 'In case you're hungry on the way.'

She looked down dully at the paper bag, which lay on her lap. Her fingers closed round the apples contained.



## *The Picture*

BY CHRISTOPHER CHRISTIAN

(From *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*)

THE man was so tired that it was painful for him even to lift the perambulator's front wheels on to the step. He was moving mechanically, and the sudden relief, when the back wheels were up, jolted him into the concrete lobby of the Baths; he noticed vaguely how the springs creaked, and the damp of the place seemed to cling, drowning any expected scent of cleanness. He watched a dark silver drop creeping down the slimy wall; he was repelled by the atmosphere, yet he stayed, fingering the money in his pocket, watching the bead of dirty moisture as it slithered down the pitted surface. Now it overtook another, passed it, slowed up; the other approached it and the man looked on fascinated, forgetting the three coins, one and sevenpence, in his pocket. The drops spread, caressing the space between them, joined; it was like courting and marriage, he thought. He felt himself smile slightly, then looked at the perambulator. He had not troubled to push it into the corner, but stood in front of it, as if dissociated from it; they were both somewhat forlorn. Now he lost interest in the mated drops, and wheeled the pram over against the wall. A door upon his right opened out into a dark passage which led, he expected, into the women's baths. He pulled at a metal handle, and a bell clanged in the dankness.

His picture-book was almost hidden under a pile of papers. The lovely apple-red and green could hardly be distinguished in the gloom; only two letters of the words SUNDAY ANNUAL were showing, s u and a piece of N. Had he time to open it, and quickly turn the pages? Time to look for a moment at his beloved picture?

A key turned noisily in the other door at the far end of the passage. He made a movement towards it, then stopped. His ears tingled to the steps of a woman. These were un-

even; he looked at the floor stubbornly, angry always that women should be old. 'Not got a towel? Then it's five-pence.' Slowly he raised his eyes. Again he was seized with impotent annoyance to see her boots, black and seamed, one with a patch over the toes; it was cracked, and grey lines met the clumsy stitches. Her ankles were swollen, and she had not laced the boots to the top, but tied them where the hooks began; one of them had no tongue; from the other it protruded, not hanging over the laces, but sticking tiredly forward. She wore a full skirt of rusty brown; it was torn a little; he recognised that the colour was warm in its mellow age. His eyes would not take in her heavy bosom; he fumbled for the sixpence, sought her face. It was wrinkled with smiling; grey creases lined her skin. He had not been able to guess the colour of her hair, was surprised that it should still be black. It was drawn straight down to a ragged bun; a hairpin was hanging from it. In her ears were little stones. Garnets. Like his mother's mother had worn. Her skin was brown, and he thought that perhaps she was of gipsy people too. He held out the sixpence, refusing the gay comfort of her eyes, and when she put out her hand for it, he did not move, holding the coin between his fingers, gazing as if beyond her. As she took it, the tips of their fingers touched. He was too conscious of his broken nails, and dropped his hand, but could not hide it in his pocket; it slid behind his back. The woman's face broke into smiling fragments: 'You're dead beat, ain't you? A bath'll fresh you up.' She dragged at the corner of her dress. Old Katrina had worn grey-flannel petticoats too. From under the coarse stuff she fetched the heavy tap key, and the key of the bathroom door tied on to it. He wondered what it felt like hard against her thigh. The brown dress fell slowly, and he watched the folds uncoiling over her knee; her legs disgusted him. She hobbled to one of the doors and opened it, but he stammered—'No, not that one. Can't I have the middle one?' It was like a child asking, almost pleading. 'Why, yes, if you like it better.' He resented her

lack of curiosity; the middle bathrooms had windows, and he longed for light. She opened the other door.

The plug lay on the window-sill; a grey, chewed-looking piece of string dangled over the edge. The other cubicles had that grey-green shiny wall; here there was yellow wood, clean-looking, on either side. She fitted the key over the tap, and turned it, and the water gushed out into the bath. He loved the colour of it, and the noise, longed to be alone with it. 'I'll get your towel, and your change,' she said. 'You can turn off the tap yourself.' Blast her! Why was she kind, like to a child? But she was old enough to be his mother, he thought.

The memory of his picture assailed him again, but there was not time to look at it. If the attendant had been young and beautiful, like Queen Mary in the picture, they would not have let her have the job. They always chose old women to look after the Public Baths; men, he supposed, had some strength and desire left in them, however old they grew, but women became useless after a while. He started to take off his coat, but dared not begin to undress when a woman, even this old harridan, might see him. The buttons of his waistcoat were shiny and small, so that he could not take firm hold upon them. They made his skin feel smooth as steel, though when he rubbed his fingers on cloth, he knew they were hard and calloused. The water was creeping up the side of the bath, but it was not yet deep enough to cover him; he wanted it to be three-quarters full. He began to take off the red handkerchief at his neck; she should see his throat and the hairs upon his chest, the strength of him. He felt tired and somehow frightened. The steam from the bath struck his face as he bent over, and filled his nostrils and eyes. He staggered slightly, then stood up. He heard the old woman's key at the end of the passage. Hastily, trembling a little, he wrenched the tap round, to stop the water. That indignity he would not suffer, that she should decide he had enough; some attendants turned off the bath before it was half full. He thought greedily, it was not as

deep as he wanted. He saw her come in, and looked away impatiently. 'Got enough water?' she asked. He held the key out to her. He wished she would stop grinning and hurry; she was hiding the great piece of iron under her petticoat again, and telling him how much the bath would rest him. 'That's it,' he said absently. Under her petticoat, where the key hung, the top of her stocking writhed, not meeting her drawers. She was firm and strong-limbed once, he told himself. He felt that she was trying mutely to tell it him herself, and was the angrier that she was old now and incapable of carrying children. He did not ask for beauty. There was a brown patch on the hand which had clutched the rusty dress. Would she never go? He undid the top button of his waistcoat, and watched her turning to leave the cubicle. In a fury of impatience, he tore the other buttons undone; there was a crack; one had left the stuff, spun across the space, fallen by the door. He stood watching, as she swayed, bent creaking to pick it up. 'I'll sew it on for you,' she said. 'Take off your waistcoat and give it me.' He was wearing no shirt; if he took off his waistcoat he would be naked to his navel. 'I can do it myself,' he told her. 'It's a woman's job,' she chuckled. 'Oughtn't to be ashamed of your body in front of an old woman like me. Never mind. Throw it over the top, when you're undressed.' He was astonished. 'Thank you,' he said, and as she went, pulling the door behind, so that the latch clicked, he thought more kindly of her for having spared him. Not that he was ashamed; not exactly; he would throw the waistcoat over the top, but when he had finished bathing, he would fetch it himself and let her see him. He would feel younger, stronger, when he was washed. He sat down on the white chair under the window, and began painfully to undo his bootlaces. Outside he could hear the attendant moving about. He wondered if she was looking into his perambulator, looking at his pictures. He could not have that, if he were not there to see. The conviction that she was prying oppressed him, so he took off his waistcoat and,

calling out, threw it across the top of his cubicle. There seemed to be very little strength in his arm, and he dropped wearily into the chair again. He heard the old woman go along the passage, probably to find a needle and thread. As he stuffed his socks into the heavy boots he had just taken off, he wondered if there were not time to creep out and look at his beloved picture; but the old woman might come back, or someone else come in, and discover him half naked, looking at a Sunday Annual. He went over the picture in his memory, as he undid the buttons of his trousers, trying to project its image upon the door in front of him. He did not want to see his body before he had bathed. Queen Mary, so young and healthy, and tender, was holding Jesus Christ in her lap; and he, fat and lusty, kicking and pulling, smiled up at . . . Surely he would have been smiling at his father. They had shown the frame too, round and carved; the mother's head was bent, so that it followed the line of the frame, yet it did not seem unnatural; she appeared to be asking herself what he wanted, what more she could do for him. She was entirely wrapped up in the child, ignorant of her husband, if he was really standing by. But the man who had slipped off his trousers, hung them upon the black-enamelled wire hook behind the door, and now stood naked, feeling with his feet the wooden rungs of the flooring, would not have minded being forgotten by that mother, if he could gaze at the child too, and at her, in the flesh.

There was a knot in the middle board of the door, a little higher than the latch; it was narrower at the top, and the brightness from the sun, shining through the upper, unfrosted, half of the window, seemed balanced on its point. Below this line, the reflection was mottled by the opaqueness of the glass; hundreds of little golden motes danced upon the wood; on the ground, below the gap where the door swung clear of the drain-boarding, the angle at which the glass caught the sun had magnified these motes into great flakes of light, moving flaccidly like shining cotton-

wool. As he looked, remembering the colours of his picture, he felt the pillar of cold air between his legs, which seemed to press upwards at his trunk, and stepped into the bath, laying himself down in it directly.

Intense pain battered every cell of his skin; the bath was far too hot, but he did not get up again. Instead, to neutralise the agony, he concentrated on further details of the picture. It was only a photograph in his Sunday Annual, but once he had seen the real thing in its frame, in the window of a religious repository in the Winchester High Street; it was marked 'Reproduction of Raphael's Master-piece—Price Three Guineas,' and he could remember every detail of the colouring, the almost translucent whiteness of Queen Mary's headdress, and the rosiness of her cheek, the rich spinach green, and the red of her clothes. He forced himself to remember the very folds and shadows. As his body became accustomed to the violent heat, he moved himself slightly backwards and forwards, rubbing his buttocks upon the rough patches where the enamel had come away. Every time he moved, his body tingled anew. At last he sat upright, and for a moment his back and chest burned evenly, rather than stung him, then cooled. Bending forward, he sluiced the water over his head, and it trickled down his rounded back. It was more comfortable like this, he thought, and wondered than what. More comfortable, he told himself, pouring the water over his head. Then he remembered; after his riding turn in the circus, when he was glued with sweat and dust, he used to run to the dressing-tent. There, he had sat over a bucket and rinsed his body with cold water. He had just had time to dry his glowing limbs, before dressing in black velvet for his special turn—a variety turn, really; he would have made money, perhaps, if he could have got on to the Halls—quick drawing and caricaturing on the blackboard. He wondered what might have happened if he had not left his gipsy band to follow this incomprehensible bent for drawing. As it was, he had fallen from Dappled Darling one day and broken his leg; when he came

out of hospital, his place in the troupe had been filled. He could still feel the stiffness in his leg occasionally; he had never ridden since, though he had had jobs with horses sometimes. At any rate, he would not have been lonely; he would have had children, possibly grandchildren. Something in him repudiated this fact; he seemed to forget it, began to lather his head with the yellow soap. When the lather was stiff and thick, so that his hair stood up on end, he began to transfer it to his chest. Then he stood up, and massaged the creamy stuff into his neck, under his armpits; coiling his arms around him clumsily, he soaped his back. With rhythmical, sweeping movements, he covered the whole of his body in the white foam, down to where the water cut his legs in two. Last of all, he rubbed it into his moustache, into the bristles on his face. Now he was encased in a shell of warmth. He undulated, moving his shoulder-blades, his stomach muscles, bending his legs, as if to stretch his skin and let the cleanness into every pore. He swayed slightly, caressing the sheer feel of it. Reluctantly he bent down, rested a hand upon the edge of the bath, lowered himself into the water. It was solid and heavy, and as his body cut into it, lifted the foam from off him, leaving a white spume upon its surface. Underneath was his new body; it would be cold when he sat up, and clean. He dragged his knees towards him, so that he might wash his feet, without sitting up. His toe nails were yellow and cracked and full of dirt. He could not clean them. Then he sat up, and in one movement was on his knees. The Corporation allowed one as much cold as one liked. He turned on the tap, and putting his head under it, let the icy water run through his hair, so that when he felt it, it was lank and sticky. The coldness trickled behind his ears, down his back. He held up his head, so that the water ran over his face, and cleaned his long moustache.

As he raised himself, he wiped away some of the soap which clung upon his leg. He stepped out of the bath, holding on to the taps to steady himself. Then he began

to dry; when he had wiped off the surplus wet, he rubbed himself, using the little towel like a loofah, with which to burnish the flesh. He lifted one leg on to the chair, and almost scraped the tender skin between his legs. He was surprised, looking at his belly; it appeared so white and flabby. Wondering a little, he pulled himself up to stand upon the edge of the bath; there was a looking-glass on the wall, but he did not want to look at his face. His stomach was not big, but it seemed to him grotesquely loose; almost it hung like a half-filled bag. His chest too was hollow, and the skin was drawn thinly across his ribs. Suddenly he saw his body in terms of imagined, loathsome colours and shadows; grey hollows, the greenness of the grey walls; bones picked out in blues and livid yellows. For a moment he began to swoon. He shook himself, as if to pull himself together. True, he was thin and his chest was unhealthily pale, but that was because he had starved so often, had so often walked long miles with an empty stomach. He had once been brown and strong, not so long ago. Poising himself precariously, he stood slowly upon the toes of one foot. The other leg, which he stuck out behind him, was heavy, hardly a part of himself. Somehow so he had leapt upon the back of Dappled Darling. One hand was against the wall across the bath, supporting him. Tentatively he removed it, waving his arms ineffectually to balance him. The sun streamed through the upper half of the windows, but its honest rays did not warm him. He seemed to shrink before them. Then he slipped, fell in his effort to recover himself, and stubbed a big toe on the drain-boards. Groaning, he sank upon the chair, and began to pull on his socks. As he fell, he had caught a glimpse of his head in the glass; the stubble on his face was grey, and his moustache drooped. His hair was dirty coloured, greying.

He heard the attendant coming back along the passage. With his eyes fixed on the latch of the door, he pulled on first his trousers, then his boots, but he did not trouble to lace them. He must get it over. Holding his coat by the



hanger, he emerged from the cubicle, out of the sun, into the damp darkness. There was not triumph in his presence. He took his waistcoat from the old woman, striving to see it in the darkness. He wanted only to sit down. Beside the perambulator was a bench. He stumbled to it, and sat with the coat and waistcoat across his knees, shivering slightly. Why did that old hag not ask about his pram? He wanted her to force an answer he would not give, to torture him.

Then suddenly his mood changed. Something like confidence came into his bearing. 'I used to think there'd be a kid in it one day,' he said. The woman's laughing eyes did not alter their expression, but he felt that her body was compassionate. He leaned forward, and dragged the Sunday Annual from under the pile of drawings, which soon he must try to sell, or use as a bait to beg a few coppers. He took a bit of coloured crayon from his pocket, and with one hand turned over the pages till he found his picture.

Idly he scratched at the picture with his chalk, drew in upon the sweet face of Queen Mary a long drooping red moustache. 'I'm too old now.' He had almost forgotten that he was not alone; was caressing his grief. Slowly, with care, he tore the page out of the book, and crumpled it into a ball. The picture was defaced, useless to him now, anyway.

## Escape

BY ELIZAVETA FEN

(From *New Stories*)

THE morning sea was soft, silvery-blue with a faint suggestion of grey. It was so smooth and still that the tiny ripples on the beach seemed to come from nowhere and linger on the sand like a shy child by the bathers' feet.

The sea was empty as far as the eye could reach. No steamer, no sail. But there were a few large white clouds sailing across the sky, and their passage above threw gigantic dabs of light and shadow on the smooth emptiness of the sea. The sun was getting hot, but its touch on the skin was still gentle like the caress of a timid lover.

It was twelve-thirty by official time, nine o'clock by the sun. The place was a town in the South of Russia, the time—summer of 1920.

'Have you been told, Nina, that your eyes are the colour of the morning sea?'

'Yes, or of the evening sea. . . .'

'I don't agree. The colour might be the same but the expression's different. There is no laughter in the evening sea.'

'And your eyes, Vadim, are like green silent forest pools. You ought to show them more, though. Why do you look away?'

'Bad habit. By the way, did you have any breakfast this morning?'

'As usual.'

'A glass of water and a slice of bread? Or no bread?'

The girl laughed and sat up, passing her hands over her long sunburnt legs. Her face was of a golden tint perhaps a shade darker than the colour of her hair. The shoulder-straps of her bathing dress were tied under her arms, leaving her shoulders bare. They had a fine curve, slim but not angular—admirable expression of delicate strength. Her

arms had the slim fullness and firmness of health. But this semblance of perfect physical fitness did not deceive her companion who noticed the slightly pinched look on her face, the thinness of her fingers, the dark shadows under her eyes.

'To tell you the truth,' she said confidentially, 'I stole a piece of bread from my aunt's cupboard, but it was so prickly and bitter that I could not eat it.'

The man's lips twitched slightly. He had a small sensitive mouth and a pale sensitive face of an indefinite age—he might as well have been twenty-two as thirty. He rummaged in a haversack by his side and produced two sandwiches and a dozen apricots. These he offered to the girl on the palms of his outstretched hands.

'You don't expect me to eat up your lunch, Vadim?'

'No, but I want you to share it with me.'

'Very well. But isn't it better to bathe first?'

'All right. Let us go and bathe then.'

The girl rose. The beach all round them was teeming with life. Human bodies of all ages and sexes in various stages of half-nudity seemed to fill every available spot on the narrow strip of sand between the rocky shore and the sea. Large, fat, prematurely aged Jewish and Greek women devoured big sandwiches which they held between greasy first finger and thumb with the little finger very much apart. They entered the sea in their long chemises, advancing slowly with giggles and screams until the water reached just above their knees. Through the wet transparency of their garments one could see their thick flabby thighs. They took one another by the hands and plunged into the sea repeatedly, giving shrill exclamations every time they went in. They suckled their babes and administered to the needs of older children—slapped them, wiped their noses, buttoned and unbuttoned their clothes. Soldiers with their rifles by them sat about in their pants of unbleached calico, slowly unwinding soiled linen puttees off their feet. Young men in slips, their legs crossed in oriental fashion, pinched at the strings of mandolines, and murmured gypsy songs in a

hoarse recitative. Everywhere bodies were sprawling—red like boiled lobster, peeling horribly from the excess of sun; sunburnt to the extent of looking purple in the shade; golden brown; pale, hardly touched by the sun and forming strange lifeless patches of no colour in the midst of all the warm shades of brown under the blazing sky. Men, women and children took off and put on their clothes, wrung out their bathing dresses, ate their food, flirted and quarrelled within a yard of one another, hardly conscious of one another's proximity. And in the midst of all this pandemonium, the dogs, possessed by the spirit of mad excitement, rushed in and out of the water, carried and dropped heavy wet stones, chased one another, leapt over people, fought in the middle of family groups, and shook their dripping bodies over bundles of clothes to the accompaniment of swearing, screaming and laughter of the crowds.

Nina, who let her eyes roam about for a minute, turned to her companion and smiled. The corners of his mouth drooped in a contemptuous grimace.

'Some time soon,' he said, 'we must go out to a place where there are no people.'

With a movement of her chin she pointed at the sea. They walked in and swam side by side, silent, completely given to the joy of rhythmic motion. In spite of all the noise coming from the beach over the water, they were at last by themselves. The sea was cool, and its velvety softness was like a new caress to the heated skin. To Nina after a long hour of dreamy laziness in the sun this sudden burst of action was like a glorious awakening. She was also conscious that this joy of action was increased by companionship. Yet she felt that her companion was not as happy as she was.

She glanced at the man swimming by her side. He was a good swimmer, though tall and slight, almost too slight to be quite grown up. His face had a certain feminine quality about it which defied analysis. Why had he this attitude of mind which prevented him from enjoying the given moment spontaneously as it came?

'It isn't true then that they've left. Look, they are still here!' said Vadim, lifting his chin out of the water.

Nina looked in the direction of his gaze. They got beyond a certain group of high rocks rising out of the water, and a larger expanse of sea opened before them. About half-way between the swimmers and the sky-line huge grey ships stood out against the background of the azure sea, their heavy towers and cross-shaped masts outlined against the paler blue of the sky. If meaning and purpose ever found their perfect expression in appearance, they did so in these men-of-war.

'Why don't they go away?' said Vadim.

'They are keeping watch over the coast.'

'Why do it? They cannot stop anything the Bolsheviks do to us.'

'They are stopping the supply of food by sea and probably hope to starve them out of the country.'

'They'll starve us to death first.'

Nina made for a small flat rock in front of them and climbed on to it. She sat with her arms round her knees gazing at the men-of-war. Vadim lay down flat by her feet.

'When I think that they are free to go wherever they like . . .' she said in a dreamy voice. 'And the people on them, free to come and go at their will. What a difference with us, the prisoners, tied to a bit of land, punished by torture and death if we try to escape! If only I could!'

'Sh-sh! What are you talking of?'

'Don't you want to?'

'But, Nina, for goodness' sake be careful!'

'There's no one here to spy on us.'

'You never know. There might be a boat close by. You don't know how far your voice carries over the water.'

'But it's intolerable to be always careful in everything one does!'

'I quite agree. I hate it. But it would be stupid to get into trouble simply through not holding your tongue.'

She spoke in a subdued voice.

'You know the house where I live? There is nothing between it and the sea, and from my room I can see two of these ships. The other morning I woke up very early: the rays of the sun coming into my room were still red. I got out of bed and went to the window. There was a small rowing boat on the sea with a man in it. He had a fishing rod in his hands. I stopped to gaze at the colours of the sea and the sky—they were very lovely. Then, unconsciously, I began watching the boat. The man put away his rod and started rowing. After a minute or two there was a whistle from the shore, then another, and a third, and a fourth. The man took no notice and continued rowing hard. Then there was a bang—but the bullet missed him. Several more shots followed, and I felt I was a fool not to have understood before. After each bang I expected the man to collapse, but the tiny oars continued going up and down, glistening in the sun. He was rowing straight towards the nearest man-of-war. Suddenly I thought I saw some movement on the ship. They were lowering a boat. In a minute I saw it coming fast to meet my fisherman. The shooting stopped. The two boats came alongside each other, the man climbed over, and they rowed back to the ship. You know, Vadim, it was the first time after many years that I nearly prayed!'

The man listened without looking at her, his chin resting on the palm of his hand. After a moment's silence she said slowly:

'It's merely a piece of luck that the man wasn't killed. The ship might not have accepted him either. Then he would have had to come back and certainly be shot for an attempted escape.'

'You never know nowadays when and how you may meet your death,' said the girl. 'People are dying in hundreds from typhus fever and dysentery. They'll soon begin dying from starvation. We don't know how many are being shot every night by the Cheka. It is so easy to get arrested. Isn't it better to risk one's life than bear it all?'

There was another short silence, then the man said hurriedly in a vexed voice:

'I suppose you're right.'

The girl glanced at him, serene. This strange attitude of mind which made him resent admitting that others than himself might be right! It was not a sign of a strong nature!

She glanced away, and her eyes became riveted again on the imposing massive form of the great man-of-war. The open sea stretched beyond the ship. It stretched far away, towards the Dardanelles and the Mediterranean—the great expanse of water open to all birds and fishes but inaccessible, forbidden, unattainable to them, the human beings who lived on its very edge. Why cannot humans trust you, sea, as birds and fishes do, and find rest on your bosom when they tire of travel?

The girl stood up, raised her arms above her head and dived in. She rose to the surface, turned round and floated on her back, dropping and rising rhythmically with the increasing swell. She turned on to her side and began swimming away, her eyes fixed on the sky-line and the ship. In a moment Vadim was by her side swimming in silence. The breeze coming from the sea was growing fresh.

A sharp whistle came from the shore.

'Is it for us?' said Vadim.

Nina did not reply. She continued swimming in the same direction. Another whistle came.

'Do you hear, Nina? We've crossed the line. We ought to go back.'

'Ought we?'

She turned and made for the shore. He gave an unconscious sigh of relief: he had been half afraid that she would continue in the same direction. What would he have done then? He did not know. This girl was acquiring a tremendous power over him. He hated being gazed at with that peculiar mixture of compassionate understanding and humorous reproach which her blue-grey eyes expressed so often. Her ready acceptance of his limitations was a continuous challenge to him, urging him to surpass himself. He kept on repeating to himself that her opinion of him was

of no real importance, but once in her presence he felt most painfully how vital it was that she should think well of him. Without really knowing it, he longed for her to admire him, and a growing conviction that it was improbable if not impossible made him at times acutely unhappy.

The beach now was well in view, and it seemed to be in a state of unusual agitation. Everybody was getting out of the water in a great hurry, dressing hastily and walking off in the direction of the town. Vadim glanced at the sky—there was no sign of a thunderstorm coming. Several more shrill whistles were blown. They could see a few khaki-clad figures wandering among the bathers, and their eyes caught glimpses of bayonets shining under the sun.

‘What’s happening?’ muttered Vadim, swimming hard.

‘I say, Vadim, you *can* swim when you want to!’

The unusual ring of approval in her voice thrilled him. He turned away, conscious of having blushed.

‘Am I going too fast for you?’

‘Oh, no!’

Vadim and Nina waded out of the sea at the moment when a young man in a white military shirt, carrying a sword and a couple of revolvers at his leather belt, passed them on the beach.

‘Hurry up, Comrades, hurry up,’ he said in a loud voice, without looking at them. ‘Take your place in the queue.’

‘What’s the queue for, Comrade?’ asked Vadim.

‘Checking of documents. Have your identity-books ready.’ And he passed on.

Nina gave a long, low whistle. Vadim turned round sharply to look at her.

‘Why?’

‘My document’s out of date.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Oh, the secretary’s forgotten to renew it, and I forgot to remind her.’

‘But why on earth . . .’

‘Don’t! You can’t help by being angry. Do you think it



is possible to slip through somehow, up and over the cliffs to avoid the Cheka agents?’

‘Look!’

He pointed at the top line of the cliffs, yellow against the bright blue skies. All along it, closing in a semi-ellipse round the narrow strip of the beach, heads in khaki caps and points of bayonets were showing. The man in the white shirt with revolvers at his belt passed them again on his way back: ‘Hurry up, Comrades, hurry up! Take your place in the queue!’

Three hours later they were still ‘occupying their place in the queue’ some way up the steep path leading to the top of the cliffs. Nina’s eyes wandered over the faces of the crowd who had been waiting all that time in the blazing sun. Only a few showed signs of anxiety and discomfort. Some tired women, who had had nothing to eat since the early morning, sat in the dust of the road with their heads hanging wearily down. Some very young men looked pale and bit their lips. But on the whole they seemed as carefree and light-hearted as if they were queueing for a play outside a theatre. Someone was pinching at the strings of a guitar, someone murmuring a song. Peals of laughter and chatting came from right and left. A boy and a girl suddenly burst into some dance steps to the amusement of the rest. ‘*A danse macabre!*’ said someone behind Nina’s back. And the man with the guitar tried to reproduce Saint-Saëns.

A small boy with a basket of cherries suddenly emerged from nowhere calling in a shrill voice:

‘Cherries, cherries, fresh from the tree, threepence a pound.’

They all pounced upon him and in a couple of minutes the cherries were gone and the boy crouched in the dust complacently counting his coppers. Nina secured a pound of sticky, juicy fruit and held the paper bag out to Vadim, but he shook his head, intent on watching the proceedings at the gates where the checking of documents was going on.

His anxiety was very obvious. She did not like it—it looked too much like cowardice.

‘Aren’t these people fun, Vadim? They are not worrying in the least!’

He did not turn to look, but she saw his ears redden.

‘I know,’ he said after a short silence. ‘It’s because they are southerners. . . .’

‘You think that excess of animal vitality makes people immune from fear?’

‘No, but the lack of imagination does.’

‘Yet even fear becomes tame if you have to live with it.’

He shrugged his shoulders. He was not going to argue until they got through. It was half-past four by official time, one o’clock by the sun—the hottest time of the day. They found themselves standing before a young man in a khaki shirt, with a red star on his peaked cap. They both held out their bits of paper: it was Vadim’s he took first.

‘Yes, this is in order. Pass on. Yours, Comrade?’

That to Nina. Vadim lingered on the other side of the gate. A soldier shouted to him to move on. He crossed to the other side of the road and stopped there.

For the first time Nina found herself face to face with a Cheka agent. So here was one of the men who deliberately set out to trap and destroy those who thought differently from themselves! She examined him with curiosity mixed with repugnance, and found that he did not look very different from others. He had an insignificant narrow face and nervous sensuous hands. His eyes were shifty, as they ought to have been in accordance with popular beliefs.

‘How is it that you’re not at your work at this hour of day?’

Nina, who expected him to notice that her document was out of date, felt relieved:

‘I am on leave,’ she said calmly.

‘Where is your certificate of leave?’

‘I haven’t one. Our office does not issue them.’

‘We’ll look into this. Pass to the right.’

On the right, surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, a group

of men, women and girls was waiting to be marched off to the Cheka as soon as their number was sufficient to justify the trip. Nina tried to expostulate.

'But, Citizen, it isn't my fault that . . .'

'We'll find out at the Cheka whose fault it is. Pass on.'

A heavy paw fell on to her shoulder and pushed her inside the doomed circle. She caught a glimpse of Vadim trying to get through and repelled by rifle-butts raised in the air. Her head swam from hunger and emotion, and she sat down on the brown grass trying to collect her thoughts.

What was waiting for her? At its best—a few days' imprisonment in a dark and filthy basement infested with lice, where everybody slept on the floor. A risk of contracting typhus fever; a chance of attracting the attentions of a Cheka man. Perhaps an offer of a spying job, perhaps something worse than that. At the end—a possible sentence of forced labour, merely because she was a 'bourgeois'—street sweeping, washing soldiers' clothes, or scrubbing floors in the barracks. That would not be so bad: the Cheka men and the lice were much worse.

She thought of Vadim with bitterness; why did he not confirm that they were employed at the same office, and that she was on leave? He seemed to be very fond of her, and yet how powerless his love seemed to be! It hardly deserved to be called 'love.' His own safety was much dearer to him than hers!

Revolt and disgust at being treated like a slave together with this human herd brutalized into silence and submission welled up to her mouth. If only she had a chance to explain, to argue with one of these Cheka men! Surely they were not completely devoid of reason!

She rose and moved cautiously nearer the gate. But her progress was barred by a huge, red-bearded soldier with a prehistoric face. She wavered for a second, then said in a quiet voice:

'Listen, Comrade, I want to speak to the agent at the gate. Here's my identity document.'

The soldier turned round heavily, looked at the crumpled bit of paper and turned away without a word. As she was prepared for curses and the raised butt of a rifle, she felt almost encouraged. She waited a second, then spoke again:

‘Look here, Comrade . . .’

No reply. She slipped through, between his large forbidding back and the support of the gateway, amazed at not being struck. What a relief! Another man was at the gates checking the documents. She held out her crumpled bit of paper and tried to explain. The man waved her aside:

‘It wasn’t I who detained you, I can’t let you go. We’ll see at the Cheka.’

So she had to go there after all. In despair she turned round and her glance fell on a huge figure in a sailor’s shirt standing at a little distance from the gate. The end of a cigarette hanging from his mouth, he watched the proceedings with a curious bonhomie. She knew him at once. He was the most dreaded figure of the popular stories about the Cheka, the man surreptitiously pointed at by people in the streets when he rode along on horseback at the head of revolutionary processions. If he really was like his reputation, then he had power, and could use it if he wished. This thought was behind her impulse, but so vague that she was only half-conscious of it when she spoke to him:

‘Really, Comrade, I don’t know why I should be detained. Look, here’s my document, quite in order. Do let me go!’

Thick, brown fingers got hold of her bit of paper, a pair of vague blue eyes, small and deep-set, pig-fashion, stared at it for a second. She wondered whether he could read or was merely pretending. He pushed the paper back into her hand; a huge paw came down on to her shoulder with a slap, and a thick voice said:

‘Off with you! Run away, kid!’

Nina wavered for a second, dazed by her good fortune, then walked off briskly, trying hard not to run and so attract

attention. But as soon as she had gone a few yards, she ran as fast as she could. She ran and laughed with happiness at her marvellous escape. Were such things really possible? A beast, a brute, an executioner—suddenly magnanimous! How could such things be?

At the turning of the road she ran into Vadim and stopped. He had nearly gone past her, pale and anxious, his eyes intent on something ahead. She caught him by the arm.

‘Nina! God be thanked! But how—how did you escape, my dear child?’

‘A magnanimous executioner. . . . But we must not talk of it in the street. . . .’

‘Come with me. You must be faint with hunger.’

He slipped his arm through hers and led her along, taking such long strides that she had to run to keep up with him. But when they reached Vadim’s house Nina refused to go in. She could not stand being in a room, she said. Yes, she would like a rest and something to eat, but in the open air. He made no attempt to persuade her and disappeared behind the door. In a few minutes he was back carrying a paper bag which contained two thick slices of rye bread and a large piece of melon. They shared the food and ate it in the adjoining boulevard, laughing and talking nonsense like a couple of happy children. They sat on a bench facing the sea, under the flowering acacias which dropped upon them their heavily scented blossoms. The colours of the day were changing fast into the colours of the evening. The blaze of melted gold had disappeared from the scaly back of the huge blue dragon restlessly curling at their feet. Tender pink and pale blue blended and passed into one another, making the sea look like one huge pearl. The sky above the setting sun suddenly blossomed with crimson, saffron and jade-green. And without waiting for the sun to go down, the insolent large moon, all pink and staring, rose on their left from behind a group of black cypresses.

They finished their meal and walked along the boulevard. The population of the southern town, accustomed to live out

of doors, obstinately refused to be driven into houses on warm, moonlit nights. Cautious people locked their gates and kept watch behind them all night, but lovers, the sleepless and the lonely wandered about the resonant acacia-bordered streets as of old. Already the stir of discreet nocturnal life was going on in the shadow of the trees. Couples stopped to whisper into each other's ear and to embrace. With a sudden pang Vadim realized that he had a great longing to put his arms round Nina, a longing that had been there for a long time, but that he would never dare to satisfy it.

A small ragged boy with a large bunch of milky-white carnations ran past them shouting: 'Buy, buy!' Vadim stopped him.

'How much?'

The boy asked double what it was worth. Vadim gave him the money and put the flowers into Nina's hand. She knew that owing to this extravagance he would have to go without lunch or supper next day, and reprimanded him. He bore the reproof meekly, and they became silent once more.

The sun plunged into the sea as in a deep luxurious bed decked in silky translucent covers. The sky hovered by, hesitatingly, then dropped her bright garments one by one on to the sun's cool and restful bed. The crimson garment went first, then the saffron, then the jade-green, and the sky stood still in her pearl-like nudity. The moon, who had been hanging over the tops of the dark cliffs watchfully and cautiously, now rose fast and drew over the sea and the sky his silvery muslin curtains like a jealous slave.

A breath of air came from the port smelling of wood-tar, flowers and seaweed. Vadim and Nina were walking down the road leading to the sea.

'Nina,' said Vadim, 'you have noticed, I think, how I feel towards you. Perhaps there's no need to tell you that I love you. . . .'

He waited for her to say something, but she only glanced at him and remained silent. He went on.

'You might ask why I am telling you then. . . . I admit it's silly. But it is very difficult to go on resisting one's longing to tell. You see, it's like prayer, or—burning incense before an icon. The icon does not need it, but the man does. I am doing it for my own sake. Even if you loved me. . . .'

He stopped again waiting for her to speak. Her hand moved in his slightly but she continued silent.

'Even if you loved me,' he repeated, with a quiver of disappointment, 'that wouldn't have altered things, for I cannot marry you. You're much too good for me.'

She turned her face towards him, her lips parted in surprise:

'What do you mean?'

'I cannot marry a woman who makes me feel inferior to herself. That is what you do.'

'How?'

'Oh, I don't know! If I tried to explain, it would be a confession. I hate confessing. . . .'

'But I want you to explain. What you said is an accusation. You accused me of making you feel inferior. Explain how I do it.'

'It isn't so much what you "do," but what you "are."' When I am with you I forget myself and feel happy. When I am back in my room, alone, I begin comparing you and myself, and find you infinitely superior. I couldn't live with that knowledge and you, side by side.'

'But why?'

'Ah! here comes the confession. It is difficult to be frank about oneself. But having got so far. . . . You see, Nina, I was brought up like many young men with an idea that as a male I am superior to females, and I went about in life without having had my conviction shattered. The women I met rather confirmed it. I also picked up another idea—that women rather want to marry men for the sake of getting married, and I despised them for it. Then I met you, and you upset all my favourite prejudices. I found that you were better educated, more gifted and far more

tactful than myself. You had something more than that—the simplicity and frankness which I can never acquire. And I have a horrible suspicion that even if I asked you, you would not marry me. . . .’

‘No.’

Though all that he had said before was to prove to her that they could not marry, her reply stung him beyond expression. It suddenly upset the logic of his argument and, instead of continuing in the same vein, he could think of nothing but to ask her the reason of her objections.

‘Do you really think, Vadim, that the present time is a time for forming ties? For marrying, settling down, and possibly having children?’

As soon as he realized that she was not rejecting him on purely personal grounds, he started arguing. All she said about the difficulties of normal life was true. But was it to last? The Bolsheviks would have to go. Most of the population was against them. They were surrounded by enemies on land and sea, blockaded by the French and English ships, attacked by brigands on railways and roads. Then there was a talk of war with Poland, with Roumania, with Greece. . . . Perhaps there was some truth in all these rumours. How did they know that all this would not change in a month, in a week, perhaps to-morrow?

‘Or in twenty years when I am forty,’ said Nina, with a bitter laugh. ‘Really, Vadim, you have an old mind! You’re like my uncle and aunts. They believe in rumours. They have patience and can wait. I have no patience. I will not have my youth wasted in waiting!’

They were standing on the edge of a sandy cliff facing the sea. It was smooth and silvery, with a long streak of gold from the moon cutting it in two. They gazed at it as they talked, but Nina’s last remark made them turn round and face each other. Vadim made an effort to steady his voice:

‘What will you do then?’

She smiled a slow smile and her lips moved.

‘What? I can’t hear.’



She moved her lips again, and he caught one word 'leave!'

'Leave?'

'Yes!' she shouted. 'And—*qui m'aime me suivra!*'

In a second she was over the edge of the cliff scurrying down the steep incline, with sand and stones sliding and rolling from under her feet. Vadim had a moment or two of involuntary hesitation on the brink of the abyss, the depth of which he could not measure. Yet the well-known feeling of inferiority, the slight of being left behind by this girl who surpassed him in all things, even in mere physical courage, made him go over the edge after her. He was furious with himself both for having hesitated and for having yielded to the impulse out of the sheer vanity of a challenged male. The abyss, however, proved to be an easy descent, its sandy surface with many loose stones offering good support to his stumbling uncertain feet. He caught Nina up on the narrow strip of sand where the quiet evening waves, small and almost noiseless, left ever-varying traces of their stealthy coming and going—the light foamy outline of their whispering tongues.

'I shall soon be jumping out of a fifth-floor window to prove to you that I'm not a coward,' he said, breathless, seizing her by the arm. 'Please explain what you said up there. You talked of leaving—when, how, wherefore?'

She pushed the bunch of carnations into his face to stop the flood of questions.

'Smell these and keep silent. It's no concern of yours. You can't come.'

'Of course I can't,' said he, in sudden anger. 'And I wouldn't if I could. It is stupid to risk one's life trying to escape from something that might go by itself quite soon. I shall consider you very foolish if you do.'

She turned to him a rigid face from which the smile had gone.

'You may! I don't mind being called foolish by someone who's too wise!'

'One can't be too wise,' he said, with trembling lips.

She saw it, and for a moment felt sorry, not knowing whether it was due to anger or pain. But all the bitterness she had been feeling against him for not being up to her ideal came back in a flood, and she continued, shutting her heart against him:

'Of course one can! You can get so wise that it makes you incapable of a decision or an action. You say you love me, but you're too wise to risk anything for my sake. You say life is impossible as it is, and yet you make no effort to find a way out! You have no courage, no perseverance, no magnanimity, nothing I could have loved you for! Nothing but your petty "wisdom." Now—I don't know why I should keep the flowers you gave me. It's ridiculous! Take them back, I don't want them!'

And she thrust the bunch of carnations into his hand.

'Nina, Nina! For heaven's sake don't push me away like that!'

But she did not even turn to look. She walked off, very swiftly, and became indistinct in the moonlight. He thought he saw her climbing up the cliff; her white dress flitted over the edge, and after that there was nothing but moonlight, the rustling of the waves, the smell of carnations, and the feeling of the irreparable in his breast.

The night was very warm and dry, with a clear moon. Close to his window rose the summit of a tall acacia, and its penetrating, persistent scent made him think of the white carnations he had dropped somewhere in the street on his way home. Nina had insulted him. He could not see her again now. It was the end. . . .

Well, he ought to be thankful! It was liberation at last—freedom from sweet and subtle tyranny. A pang of grim joy, a sting of morbid pleasure made him grin at the moon. Why should he bother about anything now?

Then he thought of a curious relief which her presence

gave him, as if the source of deep attraction tugging at his mind and body when she was away from him, once reached, gave satisfaction and set his soul at rest. If he married her . . . What a mad thought! He knew it could not be, and she had said no. But if he did, perhaps that strange happiness would last. . . .

There seemed to be no way out, and the usual majestic serenity of nature in the presence of human suffering was insulting and exasperating. Vadim found himself staring back with hatred into the clear eyes of the stars staring down at him. Hour after hour was burned away in scrutinizing, judging and blaming oneself. The dawn found him in bed, his forehead in his hands, thinking deeply.

Could he ever be what she said he was not? Could he have courage, magnanimity, perseverance? Could he overcome that 'petty wisdom' in himself and grow capable of an action to which the usual standards did not apply? He did not know, but he felt as if he would like to try.

He dressed, unable to stay in bed any longer, walked stealthily down the stairs and let himself out into the empty street.

Walking fast through the cool morning air gave him a certain relief from the throbbing pain in his head. He thought of a swim in the sea as a possible remedy against his terrible restlessness. A lane between the walls of gardens steeply descended towards the beach. Soon he found himself in a narrow ravine with yellow sandy cliffs on both sides and nothing in front but the tender smiling sky, blue and pink, with the ghost of a pale moon suspended in the air and fainting away. He ran down the steep path, saw the grey-blue, smooth, friendly sea stretching beyond a border of pale sand, and gave it a gasp of welcome. In another second he was on the beach and tearing open his shirt when his eye caught the sight of a human figure seated a few yards away and leaning against a rock. His heart thumped heavily, he wavered for an interminable second, then walked towards it. When he was near enough to recognize

her, he hesitated again, but the sand scrunched under his feet, and she glanced up. He could hardly believe his eyes, but he thought that her face brightened.

'Good morning,' said he, with an attempt at a smile. 'May I sit down by you?'

'Do,' she said, gathering her cloak round her.

He sat down. Her presence had the usual effect on him: the storm that had been raging in him all night subsided at once. His voice sounded calm and almost friendly when he spoke to her first:

'Why did you insult me last night? You know, it was as if you struck me on the face.'

She turned to look at him and had a shock at seeing him so altered. His face seemed thinner and older than when she saw him last.

'I couldn't help it,' she said almost timidly. 'You provoked me. I was probably wrong, but then you said things which made me very angry.'

'Why should you be angry with me for not being the man you can love?'

She hesitated for a second:

'Perhaps—because I would have liked you to. . . .'

His face lit up, he put out his hand, but at once checked himself and said with forced calmness:

'Well, I'm not the man, and you cannot love me, so the only thing for us is to part. But before I go I want to tell you that I did not really intend to leave you in the lurch the other day. I went to see the chief and was coming back with a letter from him—because I knew that it would have more effect than my words. So you see, Nina, I am not such a damned coward as you thought, and I don't care for my skin more than I do for you.'

'I didn't think you were a coward. I thought you were too cautious to be really fond of me.'

'Did you, then, want me to be fond of you?'

She did not reply, and her eyes remained fixed on something in the distance. He glanced in the same direction and

saw the grey imposing mass of the man-of-war against the morning sky. He took her hand in his.

'Won't you answer me, Nina? Did you want me to?'

She turned to him a softened and saddened face.

'Yes, I think so. But it doesn't alter anything, Vadim. I cannot think of love with all this going on. We must part.'

He pressed his lips to her hand. For a long minute they sat in silence. Then Nina jumped up, saying with forced gaiety: 'I'm going for a swim!'

He looked up in surprise and saw the cloak lying in a coil at her feet. She had nothing but a bathing dress under it.

'What!' he said, 'bathing at this hour?'

'Why not? I like the water cool.'

'Oh, then I shall come with you!'

The words slipped out from sheer habit, and having realized it he added shamefacedly:

'For the last time.'

She seemed to hesitate as if wanting to argue, but finding no objection. 'All right,' she said in an uncertain voice, 'come, if you like. I am going for a long swim.'

In a moment he was ready, and they walked slowly together into the coolness of the morning sea. The well-known delight of doing a thing together gradually took possession of the whole of Vadim's being. He felt he did not care how far they went as long as they kept together. They swam for ten minutes without speaking when a whistle was heard from the shore.

'It's time to go back,' said Vadim.

'Why don't you?'

'I wondered whether you heard.'

'Yes.'

'Why then. . . .'

'I'm not going back.'

He said nothing, but she heard him gasp and said hastily:

'You must leave me at once before they realize that we are together. Good-bye! Take care of yourself.'

There was no reply, but he was still swimming by her side.

'Vadim, do you realize that in a minute they'll fire on us? Why don't you go back?'

'You said you didn't think I was a coward, Nina. . . .'

'Vadim, for Heaven's sake, I shall not think any worse of you if you turn back now!'

A report came from the shore, very loud over the water. The bullet hissed across the surface of the sea some yards away from them.

'It's no use . . .' said Vadim, 'wasting our breath on arguing. We need it all to get there. It's to the ship that you are going, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

For a second she turned her face towards him, and the radiance of her expression, the smile she gave him, sent a thrill through his body.

'Shall we float?' she said. 'They won't see us then, and we must rest.'

They did so. Another report came, then a third. A minute or two passed in silence.

'They think we're hit,' whispered Nina. 'Shall we go on?'

They started off again, and as soon as they moved the shooting began too, report after report. The bullets sang so close round them that they glanced anxiously towards each other and hurried their strokes as if hoping against reason to get out of the rifles' reach. The rest of the time Nina's eyes were intent on the ship: she thought she saw some movement aboard, a couple of heads hanging over the bulwarks. Were they likely to see them?

The distance from the ship did not seem to decrease; and Nina's arms were getting tired.

'I'm going to rest,' she gasped and turned over on her back. Vadim was by her side, blood dripping from his cheek.

'Heavens! Vadim, you're wounded!'

He was floating on his back, breathing heavily.

'Am I?'

'Yes, yes! Your head's bleeding. Can you hold yourself up?'

'I'm all right. It doesn't hurt. I don't feel it.'

'But we must stop this bleeding.'

'We must swim on, Nina. Never mind me. We must get there. Come on.'

He smiled at the thought that her anxiety for him should have increased so much his physical strength. A part of his fatigue seemed to have gone. As she was turning her anxious face towards him, he plunged his head into the coming wave to wash off the blood, and spare her the sight of it.

'Vadim—are you sure—that you can get there?'

'Yes. Nina, dear, don't worry. You're wasting your strength. Don't talk.'

She strained her eyes to see what was happening aboard the ship. It seemed decidedly closer now, but oh! how far still! There were heads looking over the bulwarks, and she thought she saw one of the ship's boats swinging on its ropes. It was moving, it started gliding down.

'Ah! Vadim! they see us, they're coming!'

He smiled at her with a long streak of blood down his cheek. He seemed so cool and self-possessed, much more so than herself. She had a great pang of self-reproach and desperate longing to show him how much she cared for him. But no words came.

There was the boat for certain, moving through the water. Her breath came heavily, hurting her chest. But she was listening for Vadim's. In her desire to give him more strength she came closer and gasped in his ear:

'Vadim—I was wrong. You are—the man I can love. I—do—love you.'

He was on his back with his eyes closed. He smiled without opening his eyes, and a small wave rolled over his face. For a second she thought he was going, and clutched at his arm in terrible fear, but his face came up again with its smile and its streak of blood. He opened his eyes and looked at her. Nina could hear the oars and the sound of voices speaking in a foreign language.

'They're coming, Vadim, they are close. Can you hold on?'

The reply came in a low murmur, but very distinct:

‘I really don’t much mind—dying now.’

She floated, listening with all her being to the approaching oars. Then, with an enormous effort of will, fixing her eyes on Vadim’s face, she cried in a ringing voice:

‘I forbid you!’

A few minutes later they were aboard the man-of-war.



# *The Wayside Spring*

BY OLIVER GOSSMAN

(From *The London Mercury* and *Story*)

WE were descending the farm road in two groups, my parents and Catherine's in front, Catherine and myself lagging ten paces or so behind. It was a fine morning in September and the distant hills wore the bronze hue of the season, while the slight east wind lightly brushed the surface of the firth to an opaque, Wedgwood blue.

We two had just become engaged the evening before, and the two families, who had nothing else in common, set forth on this formal walk together to put a bold front on what couldn't well be helped. My mother was convinced that any only child, with the exception of myself, must be a spoilt child. And Catherine's mother having been an early flame of my father's, on that account, strange to say, he had formed a poor opinion of her and all her establishment.

But Catherine's mother had yesterday shed a tear or two and bidden us kiss each other before everybody under the family chandelier. It was awkward for us, who had been so long used to steal our kisses behind all their backs. Our passion, hitherto inseparable from a delicious sense of guilt, at that one moment abandoned us. 'Now, indeed, we are in for it,' was what we both thought, not a little dismayed.

And it was the first occasion the Professor had ever had to shake hands with me. It chilled me further that he looked at me in his absent-minded way, appraising me cursorily enough yet apparently full of doubt. As if I had been, was and always would be a foregone conclusion. It was not aimed so much at me as at the species: which made it all the worse, for any man of spirit would rather be damned in himself than in his classification. So you might look with misgiving at your new coat and say: 'Yes, yes, the nap is new, but it is the same old story.' He lacked self-confidence, the old man, and for that reason he wore a sceptical air, much

as he wore his spectacles; and just where he mostly wore those, on the top wrinkles of a forehead highly polished by a life of academic thought.

Our moorland walk, however, the tonic air, and the sunny prospects of sea and skyline, restored to liberty our natural feelings again, and in the pure September sunshine they recovered all their old warmth and inherent stealth. Birds were about, a flock of gulls came ashore and alighted on the green slope beneath us, a covey of partridges rose from the field above us and made off with a brief to-do of their watchman's rattles. The hedgerows were bright with their various berries, the briars red with their hips-and-haws, and fresh troves of bramble kept showing up long after we had had our fill of them, our fingers and our handkerchiefs stained deep with the tell-tale juice, which is crimson, but like good ink, turns black. All this, and the distant sails, and the sailing clouds, and the sheep browsing, and the hum of an occasional bee, and the crown belfry of Gourock town far off, accorded very well with the blend of languor and ardour that possessed our young limbs.

The group in front came to a halt. It was the Professor, with his light-grey tail-coat, his wideawake in one hand, his ebony stick in the other, who had stopped in his tracks. As we came up, either by chance or under some sly professorial spell perfected by long practice, we all formed the best part of a circle about him. He was pointing with his monitorial stick at a small spring in the bank by the wayside.

'The soul at peace with itself,' he said.

Out of politeness, or respect for the new bonds of relationship on all sides, also perhaps because it was a Sunday morning, yet with constraint nevertheless, we all took this very solemnly. We looked at the spring, we looked at our feet. Then Catherine and I looked with a wealth of understanding at one another, while my father looked up at the sky and cleared his throat of the only audible trace of embarrassment amongst us.

The water of the little pool was certainly very clear, and

owing to the character of the soil at the bottom it was in colour a rich golden brown like a very fine old brandy.

The Professor next stepped forward, struck his stick deep into the spring, and started to stir up all the mud at the bottom with deliberate violence. Wisps of his white hair waved up on his head and the exertion brought a flush right over his brows. Catherine's mother and mine together cried: 'Oh!'—somewhat ineffectually.

'No one is immune,' said the Professor. 'You can do the same with any human soul.'

One result of this interruption was that we now proceeded in three groups, or pairs. The Professor, of course, was the first to move, his coat-tails flapping with the comical oddity by which you could have identified him in a crowd, owing to the slight limp he had of the left leg. We were all refreshed, like a small congregation issuing from church cheered to find the sermon much shorter than they had expected it to be. We two at once dropped behind, full of ourselves. My parents took the lead, my small, self-sufficient father stepping out with his jaunty alacrity, whistling through his thin moustache in the noiseless, non-committal way he had.

My mother laboured along by his side in her habitual good humour, a little wistful as she mostly was towards the end of her rare hours of leisure; with just a trace of a stoop, too, because of her ailment, as if the small of her back must still nag at her cheerful and serene spirit. Her comfortable figure had a cornucopian aspect, for she carried in the bend of her tender left arm the booty of early autumn for her vases at home: some heather, some holly, beautiful long grasses, sprays of thorn berry, and the like. Catherine's mother carried a similar armful to begin with; but she kept dropping bits of it in her progress. It became my business to pick these up as we reached them. I gave them to Catherine, who popped them into the large straw hat which swung by its broad ribbon from her arm. As we thus descended the hillside by that grey, grim farm road, in three appointed pairs, we might have been a stray fragment from

some druidical procession. The three uniform bunches of nature's casual bounty heightened the remotely sacrificial effect.

'Daddy meant that for me,' Catherine said. She was a headstrong young woman, given, I knew, to taking things to herself. If there is one thing tries my patience more than another it is having to enter into long explanations of something which doesn't, in fact, exist. But Catherine had taken the brief homily much to heart; she showed an unexpected seriousness now quite equal to her father's; her usually sunny brows remained clouded as a result of the short, arbitrary tempest which the Professor, with the vortical churning of his ebony stick, had cast into the dreamlike perfection of the unoffending wayside spring.

'They had a dreadful quarrel last night,' she said.

About me! That was naturally my first thought.

'We did not come into it,' she went on, 'not directly, that is; only by the time everything was coming into it. It was as if our happiness, after they had been talking of nothing else for three hours, suddenly meant nothing to them. What can they have to quarrel so shockingly about that is secret to themselves and has nothing to do with anybody else?'

What could I say to that? The marital quarrel, the source of a thousand popular jokes in every land and amongst all conditions of men, is a phenomenon of our ungovernable nature that the scientific mind can only accept. But in our beatific circumstances I could not speak in that strain. It was easy to surmise that two elderly people, apparently so similar in small things and so profoundly different in their major realities, must have many a set-to. The Professor could never have been brought to understand that Catherine's mother was easy-going and unconventional simply from inertia: from an innate conviction that the world around her, including the Professor himself, would be a model of order and stability if only it adjusted itself to her needs.

Catherine was evidently thinking the same, though in different terms.

'It's not good in marriage to have the same faults,' she said, quite unaware how oddly her sagacity expressed itself. 'If you are both extravagant, for instance That's not the case with my parents, such as they are. They are not exactly careful, I know; still, they are simple in their tastes, which is just as good. But they are both astonishingly forgetful about things. Our dinner-table would be nothing better than a buffet, if we hadn't to wait for Daddy to say grace.'

'Yes; you said your mother was there yesterday when I turned up, only because it began to rain and she hurried back for her umbrella.'

'That's right. Daddy is absent-minded because he is thinking; whereas Mother is absent-minded because she is not It's very old-fashioned, but I like to hear Father say grace his bowed head is so noble. When we have to wait for him he says it beautifully. When we have to wait for Mother he doesn't rush it as you might think he only makes it very heart-searching, as if there were a famine throughout the land '

In the floral wake of Catherine's mother I here dipped like an expert gull and retrieved a sprig of oak with flawless leaves and two ornate acorns on it. Catherine stopped to tuck this into her improvised basket, taking care that the acorns should not be broken off

'But surely I had some heather here!'

'So you had,' said I.

We turned round, and there in the dry, dustless roadway, not very far behind us, we spotted the little purple bunch. 'That comes of talking,' Catherine said fretfully; while I trotted back and fetched her heather.

'You know my room was painted yesterday morning, and because they thought the strong smell of the fresh paint would give me hay-fever or painter's snuffles or something, it was arranged that I should sleep in the study downstairs. As soon as I had gone to bed they forgot all about me. That's how I came to overhear everything. And what a quarrel! I was well tucked in when it began. I started up I could do nothing but lie there on my elbow till my elbow

ached, not daring to make a single creak, watching the thin streak of light under my door'

Catherine was speaking mournfully. It was no laughing matter for either of us; she was speaking of her, to me Catherine's, parents. Her drollery was due, I believe, to the salt sharpness of her sensations; it was much like the deceptive sparkle of incipient tears. She made her digressions, too, as if, having unguardedly entered upon the betrayal, she was now anxious to postpone it. She could have had any help from me that lay in my power. We might have stopped and done some blackberrying again. Or she could have tossed her head, seized my arm, and, with one of her mad-cap cries taken to the grassy, hazardous declivity on our left hand. That sort of impulse, casting care to the winds, was not new to us; it is second nature to lovers, if it is not, in fact, their primary nature. But she was brooding, and so she walked on and continued. Despite the small despair into which she was plunging herself, she looked capital. The summer sun had ripened her colour, freckled her forearms, and added to her sovereign well-being a provoking lassitude.

'There was something in the afternoon,' she said, 'but your arrival put a stop to that. How nice they were with us, and especially with one another!' At night it broke out suddenly, about some notes Daddy said he couldn't find. I'd never put it past Mother to file away any notes of Daddy's with the correspondence she stuffs into that old bureau of hers. She might even stick them up on the spike in the kitchen with the household accounts. On the other hand, my father has a way of bringing papers with him into the sitting-room to read over while he is having his tea, and then he puts them on the sideboard behind him. As a matter of fact, I found the things this morning on the tea-trolley, with a box of chocolates Mother had bought and two books Father had from the library. So that explains nothing. The notes had really less to do with their quarrel than a puff of wind has to do with a house on fire when the loft has been smouldering away for a whole week.

'Perhaps their separate tempers might have blown off in one way or another if they had not come to a head just on that day. We had the painters in. Daddy came back from his morning walk with his notes and his thoughts and all, to find Mother and the paperhangers turning his study upside down. And there was the grand dinner being prepared for me and you in the evening, when we are accustomed to a makeshift supper. Daddy threw up his hands at three o'clock and loudly devoted the day to us. Finally, Mother disappeared before afternoon tea and only turned up five minutes before you came, and then only to fetch her gamp. But I don't know. Poor Mother, when she likes, can be easy-going in such an insufferably long-suffering sort of way: letting things slide as if every urgency, including her own, were simply too much for her unique common-sense. When she has us all looking for her handkerchief, she laughs with such a funny sort of triumph, you'd think it wasn't *her* nose was running. If Mother is ever killed by a bull or a locomotive it will be because she can't understand they are in earnest. For Father made the state of affairs clear enough. Where I lay in the dark I could hear him fumbling around for his notes, and grumbling and growling. Snarling, in fact. My father! who wears his dignity as best he can, I know, but it's his, he has a right to defend it. All the time he was trying to get away from her, and all the time she was trying to get a hold of him. As a rule Mother can never stick to the point, now she could stick to nothing else. "You've mislaid them," she kept repeating, "that's all." And whenever Daddy touched any object, wasn't he savage! I could hear that if a chair got in his way he kicked it. Mother took to herself all this violence he was trying to get out on anything but her that came in his way. Whenever he kicked anything she cried out. And she kept repeating, when it was clear that the notes didn't matter a scrap to either of them. "You've mislaid them, I tell you, that's all." "Then let them go," Father said; "they're of no account, in this damned house, that's plain." Mother said, "Don't swear, please," and

Father at once shouted "Damnation!" Money came into it, too, between *them!* How he couldn't make any, how she couldn't save any. Money is the devil, the shadow of it is more important than any light it ever casts. What things they said to one another—such terribly true things but such terribly small things! They turned inside out everything that makes them both so lovable. I never knew the truth could lie so brazenly. It made no difference that I couldn't see them; it made it worse, in fact. They became so ugly as they went on, uglier and uglier. Suddenly Mother gave a little cry and there was a tremendous smash!

Catherine paused when I stooped to pick up a spray of withered camomile flowers. Her now tragic little stage was fresh in my memory, the conspicuous objects in it, the very limited space at the disposal of the two actors choking and choking each other with their scandalous passions. The guess I made was uncannily well-informed.

'It was a plate,' Catherine said. 'It was the big china plate that has stood against the back of our sideboard as long as I can remember. It was always slipping; it had been down before; it was cemented and wired all over. But Father had taken it up and dashed it to the ground. Mother, I could hear, was down on her hands and knees trying to gather up the pieces. I could hear them tinkling. "You've broken it, you've broken it," she kept repeating. I was glad she spoke, I was glad to hear the chips tinkling. The silence after the smash was the sort of silence there must be after a murder. All Father said, and in a very hard, angry voice, was, "Something had to go." But there were too many pieces even for both her hands. I heard them all tinkle together on to the carpet again. Evidently she fetched the fire-shovel or the ash-pan or something for them, for she swept them up very noisily and went out into the kitchen. From there she kept repeating: "What am I to do with this, what am I to do with all this?" I don't know what she did with it, where she has put them. She didn't come back. She went from the kitchen straight to the stairs, crying now,



poor Mother, but all in the wrong way. She went up slowly, sobbing querulously step by step, *at* Father. There was a little click the streak of light under my door vanished. Was that his answer? Perhaps it just so happened. It was the first chance he had had to do something ordinary and necessary and he did it. On the landing above, at their bedroom door, Mother was still weeping, still all in the wrong way. If only she could really have broken down and not kept crying so from a closed heart!

'My father sighed. When I heard him move at last, very brusquely, it took all the strength out of me to think what a misery it is for them both to have to sleep now in the same room. At least, I thought, he has control of himself again. He went out as quietly as he could and switched off the hall lamp, and he closed the sitting-room door very cautiously. I mean he didn't slam it. But suddenly I realized that he had shut it from the *inside*. I heard his step, his strong shoe squeaking a bit, first on the carpet, then on the linoleum surround. He opened *my* door! And he was feeling for the switch on the wall before I could call to him in a loud whisper "Daddy, you've forgotten!" He started, and didn't speak, but he let the switch be. It was pitch dark. The colder air from the big room came in through the open door. It was like a ghost. Why did I feel at that moment so far sorer for him than for Mother? He was there, of course; that's true. "Wait," I said, like a conspirator; "just a jiffy." What else could I say? You can't just say "Cheer up!" I couldn't, above all, have said what my heart was crying out to him. "I can't, I can't bear my father to be ashamed!" My dressing-gown and my things were on the back of his swivel chair, I knew. I jumped out and slipped into my dressing-gown and took all my fimsies over one arm. I groped for my slippers, but I couldn't find them, so I just left them. It was pitch dark, I had to feel for the door. In doing so my hand touched his neck softly where he stood and brushed his beard. All I could say was. "Good night, Daddy!" He did not answer. He did not even sigh again.

As I went upstairs I would sooner have bitten my tongue out than let him have to listen to any more crying, of any kind'

While Catherine was telling me all this, so evident was her increasing distress that I was concerned to maintain a lighter heart by watching the white clouds sailing over the blue sky, and the few brown sails playing away out on the blue sea, and the restless gulls wheeling now far beneath us but still high above the dwarfed trees that screened our quiet, Sunday shore. 'So you see how he meant it for me,' said Catherine, 'up there at that well or wayside spring of his' When I saw that she was now weeping a little on her own I said 'Dear Catherine, you must not take it so to heart'

'To heart!' she cried. 'Shall I then take it to avizandum? Please be reasonable.'

By this time we were a long way behind. My parents, so far ahead as to be quite small, were struggling with a big gate across the roadway. Despite their fundamental variance, I had never heard them quarrel. They would not for the world have exposed themselves or one another, not even in the privacy of a raft at sea, to disorder of any sort. They never wore that slightly ragged aspect the Professor and Catherine's mother were at times capable of betraying. It was as if in their case no angry tooth had ever been extracted, as if they had always contrived to kill the nerve. Whether the initial pain is less or more, whether the difference is not solely one of appearances, that is by rights their secret. Though they now looked small, diminished by distance, they looked a spry and hopeful couple as the great gate swung gravely open to make way for them. My father waved vigorously to draw our attention to the gate, bequeathing it, so to speak, as a duty to the oncoming generations. The Professor signalled back with his ebony stick and his hat, both at once, as one shoos chickens, sheep, doubts, difficulties, anything. forward, out of the way! It was not easy to see him as an angry man. From behind he had rather a

round little figure, in front too, for that matter. He limped, as I have already said, for which reason his good leg was all the stronger. But that made him heavy down below. Up above he was light, even airy. His hair, prematurely grey, was now a beautiful silvery white, and Nature herself had graced his fine cranium with the accolade of a perfect tonsure. He was by routine an Anglican on one ground or another, but showed up with astonishing force at a revivalist meeting once, in the heat of the day, on top of a grassy barrow, a mound over graves supposed to be Roman. Catherine's mother was not actually taller than the Professor, but what with her hat and her sex she looked taller. She had a fine girlish figure, perhaps too girlish. When my parents were already out of sight round the bend our road takes beyond the farm gate, she waved also as a bright after-thought. She was of a balmy, summery disposition, thriving on temperate and propitious airs.

An attempt on my part to be as light-hearted as possible encountered a mild rebuke. 'You don't seem to suffer,' I said, 'from painter's sniffles.'

'I didn't sleep there,' Catherine said, 'I slept with my mother.'

Catherine seized my hand. She twined her fingers unashamedly with mine, she snuggled up to me as we walked, and I was abashed by the peculiar, smoke-like odour of her hair. She was twenty at that time. She sought my protection. She was of her generation, not buxom, but she had a bosom, a feature which has always been very rare in its perfection, though breath be its sole inspiration, a breath visible on frosty mornings. Her bosom contracted readily with any set-back, with fear, for example, positively leapt with indignation, was, under the rush of joy, compassion, or any other form of generous sensation, a sight to see. She did not merely speak her thoughts, she breathed with them the whole summer of her larger nature. And we two should have made a very handsome picture there, could it be said of us as we walked thus in silence hand-in-hand, Catherine

with her head submissively bowed, that we were at that moment together resolving. Such a catastrophe, and do we live to be a hundred, can never befall us. But it was not so Catherine's call to me to be reasonable was justified by her emotions, but it was unjust on the facts. I am, I was then, only too disposed to take my stand on reason, than which there can be no more searching form of obstinacy, because of the subtle way it entangles both parties. And Catherine was a wilful young woman. She was nothing if not wilful, with her tip-tilted nose, her quick nostrils, her colourless but lawless hair, and her somewhat wide mouth. Her instincts, very practical when in repose, were asking her, in the name of our vulgar humanity, what might fate not have in ambush for us? She sought my protection, she crept, so to speak, into the very palm of my hot hand, seeking to console herself, to console us both. I make bold to say, long in advance.

We were now being hailed. We stopped. The Professor and Catherine's mother had passed through the gateway, of one accord they turned and called out to us something of which only the one word 'gate' reached us which, to be sure, was enough. We waved back and the others went on. Whether it was because they had unexpectedly acted in concord, on a simple impulse, or whether it was because she was just as capable as Catherine herself was of taking things to herself, in this instance with superior reason, at any rate Catherine's mother suddenly poked her arm under the left arm of the Professor. The Professor tucked up his elbow comfortably without hesitation, also without any loss of that special dignity of his which he owed entirely to his private world of sublime ideas. Presently he pointed with his ebony stick, monitorially as ever, far away over the water at some sunlit curiosity of our skyline, possibly the cleft or geological fault in the hills above Kilcreggan.

And we never shut that gate. It may be standing wide open to this day. Such gates generally are. That was the first and obvious duty we, in our exuberance, ignored.

Another covey of partridges rose on our right, the first brown flash and flight of them as startling as a gun brought quickly to the shoulder Catherine, who had drawn off from me the moment we were hailed, again seized my hand With a wild whoop we leapt from the roadway Our young blood leapt with us, and Catherine's bosom leapt too. From the gate a dry-stone dyke ran down the slope before us. The grey farm road came back on a long bend towards us, so that by taking this course we should come out well in front of the other two pairs But the descent was perilous. The short grass gave no foothold, the declivity was broken by loose stones and small lichened boulders, clumps of whin, small patches of heather, mole-hills, and for all we knew old rabbit burrows We retained our equilibrium, when that was in danger, by the natural expedient of racing faster. Catherine never knew how often she owed all her cherished limbs to the strength of my terrified arm All obstacles swept past us, the green fields, the woodlands, the wall, rushed up to meet us Only the sea and the remote hills and the sky kept their disdainful, even respectful distance When I saw like an island of salvation a more or less level patch coming, I strengthened my grip on her hand and with a cry of 'Hold tight!' I swung her round by a movement known on the ice as 'Port your helm!'

My parents as they approached, witnesses of our outburst, were wearing off in bright smiles their first horrified expression. Far behind, Catherine's mother and the Professor were descending the braeface in perfect equanimity, oblivious of us all. Only after I had clambered over the dry-stone dyke, and helped Catherine to clamber over as well, both of us breathless and shining, did I observe that the hat she had swung on her arm by its broad ribbon, her basket if you like, was empty.

## *Belcher's Hod*

BY LESLIE HALWARD

(From *New Stories*)

EVERYBODY in the building trade knew Jim Belcher. He was a plasterer's labourer, a great barge of a man who gloried in his own strength and boasted of the beer he could drink. He was about fifty, and had been in the building trade all his life. He knew his job. He had worked with master craftsmen, gauging the stuff for them to use, cleaning each tool for them as they put it down, in the days when work was done leisurely and well. For six months now he had been working on an estate, where the houses, every one alike, were thrown up overnight and the plaster slapped on the walls, he said he believed, with a shovel. 'No sooner is your back turned than the bloody stuff's gone,' he would say. 'They must eat it, I should think.'

But no two plasterers could use more stuff than Belcher could carry. If they tried to rush him he would load them up until the stuff was piled so high on the spot that it fell over the sides on to the floor. 'Hold on!' they would shout. 'Look at the mess you're making!' 'I thought you wanted some muck,' he would say, as if surprised and hurt. After that they wouldn't shout for him again, but would let him keep carrying at his own pace. All those he served for the first time made some remark about Belcher's hod. 'One hodful fills the spot.' 'It's as big as a bloody wheelbarrow.' Those were the sort of things they said about it.

For Belcher's hod was unique. It was an immense size. He had made it himself and had painted the outside a brilliant green. He was very proud of his hod. 'It takes a man,' he would say, 'to carry that.' He carried it, full of wet floating, with superb ease. He would let nobody else use his hod or even touch it. Every night before he knocked off he washed it and dried it with rags as carefully as if it were made of gold.

One night Belcher went drinking with a gang and got so drunk that three or four of them had to half carry him home. He managed to get to the kitchen and then dropped on to the sofa and fell asleep. There his wife left him, fully dressed, and went to bed. He got up in the night and was sick in the sink. He slept again and woke about five o'clock. He still felt bad, but went to work at the usual time.

At breakfast time he ate nothing. The thought of food made his stomach turn. One or two of the others asked him what was the matter with him, and he said simply. 'I got up the pole last night,' and they all laughed. Afterwards, when they started work again, Belcher began to feel he would go mad if he didn't have a drink. He went on working dourly. At eleven o'clock he decided that he could not stand it any longer. He went to Plant, the foreman.

'Stop me half an hour so's I can slip down to "The Stars" and wet me whistle,' he said.

Plant nodded sympathetically. He himself had many a time got drunk.

'How are your mates fixed?' he asked.

'I've just loaded them up,' said Belcher. 'They'll be all right for half an hour. Curly'll drop 'em a couple of hods on if they want it.'

Plant nodded again.

Belcher went and put on his jacket and hurried off to 'The Stars'.

In the bar of 'The Stars' he ordered a pint. He drank the pint and was going out when he bumped into a man named Tull, who was just coming in. Tull was an out-of-work painter, an old drinking companion of Belcher's. They had not seen each other for about three months.

'Come and have one,' said Belcher, when they had exchanged greetings.

They drank a pint each, then Belcher said: 'Well, I'm off. I've got to get back on the job.'

Tull had just the price of two pints in his pocket. 'Have one with me,' he said.

'All right,' said Belcher 'Just one Then I must be off I've got to get back on the job'

They drank another pint, then Belcher said 'Could you do with another?'

Tull nodded

They drank.

Then Tull said 'Well, I can't ask you to have another I've got no more money'

'That's all right,' said Belcher 'Have this one with me'

When they had drunk three more pints, Belcher began to tell Tull about his daughter

'My daughter,' he said, 'is a whore'

'Eh?' said Tull

'A whore,' said Belcher

Tull nodded

'She went to Liverpool,' said Belcher, 'with a bloke'

Tull nodded.

'He was married,' said Belcher 'Drink up. Drink up, Charlie, lad You'll have it go flat'

'It's flat enough as it is,' said Tull.

'That's right,' said Belcher

At closing time they came out arm-in-arm. Belcher was still telling Tull that his daughter was a whore Tull fell to his knees on the pavement Belcher stood and looked at him, unable to do anything. Finally two other men picked Tull up and said they would see him home

'That's right,' said Belcher 'I've got to get back on the job'

When he got back on the job he ran into Plant, the foreman. Plant looked at him and said 'You'd better get off home, I should think, and get some sleep.'

'What for?' said Belcher 'I ain't tired'

He began to take off his jacket, but couldn't manage it.

'Here,' he said 'Here. Help me off with this'

Plant caught hold of the jacket and jerked it on again

'What's the game?' shouted Belcher. 'What the bloody hell's the game?'

'You get off home,' said Plant, 'and get some sleep'



Belcher pushed his face against Plant's. 'Could you make me go home?' he said 'Could you make me?'

Plant said nothing

'Could you?' said Belcher 'Could you make me?'

Plant said nothing

A number of navvies had stopped working to watch the fun Belcher turned to them

'Is there a man amongst you as could make me go home?'  
Is there a man amongst you as could do it?'

They all laughed at him

'There ain't a man amongst you as could do it,' said Belcher. He turned to Plant 'I ain't going home,' he said 'I'm stopping here.'

'You can do what the hell you like,' said Plant.

He walked away. The navvies resumed work

Belcher stood where he was for a minute or two, his head bowed, as if deep in thought. Then he walked to the end of the house he stood near His two mates were working there. They had just started to render the gable-end with cement, ready for roughcasting. They were on the topmost scaffold. Curly was serving them, carrying hodfuls of cement up two ladders.

'Eh!' shouted Belcher

The two plasterers either didn't hear him or else pretended not to. Anyway, they took no notice of him.

'Eh!' he shouted again

They still took no notice of him.

Muttering to himself, Belcher walked back to the bank. Curly was just loading his hod. He held the shaft of the hod, just under the box, in his left hand, and the shovel, close to the blade, in his right. The handle of the shovel he passed between his parted legs and pressed against his behind, stooping slightly and pushing the handle down each time he lifted the shovel. Belcher watched him load it.

'Eh,' he said. 'Why don't you get a bloody hod?'

'I've got one, ain't I?' said Curly. 'What would you call this?'

'That?' Belcher spat in the cement 'You don't call that a bloody hod. Here' He pointed to his own hod, standing shaft uppermost on the ground a few yards away. 'Look at that one That's a hod, that is Look at it'

'I've seen it,' said Curly 'Many a time I don't want a hod like that'

'What's the matter with it?' demanded Belcher

'Nothing,' said Curly.

'Then why don't you want one like it?'

Curly shouldered his hod and began to climb the first ladder.

'Why don't you want one like it?' shouted Belcher.

'You go home,' said Curly, 'and go to bed'

Belcher watched Curly climb the first ladder. Then he had an idea He'd show him how to load and carry a hod By Christ, he would! He fetched his hod and with difficulty set it right way up He held the shaft in his left hand just under the box. Curly's shovel was standing upright in the cement Belcher stretched out his right hand and leaned forward, but he couldn't reach it He leaned forward more, and almost overbalanced He stood still for a moment, staring at the shovel. Then he loosed his hod, stepped forward, and pulled the shovel out of the cement. The hod fell to the ground and the shaft broke off just under the box

Belcher dropped the shovel and looked at his hod His jaw dropped and his eyes opened. He walked round the hod and looked at it from another angle He stooped and examined it. His eyes opened wider, grew round and glassy, like a madman's eyes. He straightened himself and poked the shaft with his toe. It moved, and the box did not move. It was broken! His hod was broken! It could easily be repaired, but he could not think of that He only knew that it lay there at his feet in two pieces—the box and the shaft. *It was broken.*

Curly came down the ladder and saw the handle of his shovel lying in the cement.

'You dirty bastard,' he said to Belcher.

He got a piece of newspaper and wiped the cement off the handle.

He looked at Belcher.

'What's the matter with you?' he said.

Belcher did not speak. He still stared down at his hod.

'What the hell's the matter with you, man?'

'I broke me hod,' said Belcher.

'That's a bit o' bad luck,' said Curly.

He went on working.

'Come here, Curly,' said Belcher.

Curly went to him.

'What's up?' he asked.

'Give me my hod,' said Belcher.

'What for?' asked Curly.

'Give it to me!' shouted Belcher.

He held out his arms, and Curly laid the great box in them and tucked the shaft under his right armpit.

'What're you going to do with it?'

Belcher did not answer. He set off, staggering, down the road. The navvies watched him, laughing. One of them shouted something. He took no notice.

When he got home he went into the kitchen.

'Look,' he said to his wife. Tears ran down his cheeks.

'Look, mother. I broke me hod.'

# One Night in a City

BY NORAH HOULT

(From *Life and Letters*)

THIS is the story that the young girl told me  
I had gone to see her, because I learnt that she hadn't been well, and I thought it was lonely for her since she lives by herself in a room at the top of a big house near the city

She was sitting up when I arrived, and I asked her how she had slept the night before

'Indeed,' she said, 'and I didn't sleep a wink. But for all that there was enough doing for me to be kept well entertained'

'How was that?' I asked her, and then she started talking.

'I knew there wasn't a wink of sleep in me, so about half-past midnight I got up and sat in the chair by the window. It was quiet, for the trams and buses had all stopped, and I thought of everybody gone home and in their beds.

'But they hadn't all gone home. For a train came in at the station below bringing people back from a seaside excursion. It wasn't that the trippers were noisy: it was just that at one moment the street was deserted, and the next there were forms standing there under the pillars and on the steps leading out of the station, and drifting down the streets. They lingered round not saying much, for they were tired. The children were dragging after their mothers and fathers, and the mothers were walking with bent shoulders so that you'd pity them trudging away with never a tram to take them home. Well, quite soon, they had all gone their ways and were out of sight

'The next thing that happened was something that gave me a laugh. First of all I heard voices singing *Three Little Maids from School*, and then I saw that the singing came from three men in evening dress who were marching up the street, and not marching so steadily, I might say! Well, that's nothing uncommon, but what gave me the laugh was the

way they all stopped just where Hay Street turns off, and each of them shook hands with each other, and said good-bye. They lifted their top hats to each other as if they were performing some grand final ceremony, and then, lo and behold, on went my three brave men as if they'd never said farewell at all. I wondered what time it would be before they'd really make up their minds to part, and if each of them would find their way safely at the end of it, and what their wives would be after saying to them.

'There was nothing but small odd things for a while after. A man and a very finely dressed-up girl with yellow curls came up, and leaned against the railings belonging to the school opposite. They stood talking in low voices and looking each other up and down. Then round the corner came a file of four men, poor down-and-outs walking between two Salvation Army officers. They'd be on their way to the shelter above, I suppose. The Salvation Army man at the back stopped and spoke to the man and girl; they laughed and turned away from him, then the file went on again.

'Soon away went the couple. All got very quiet. I could just hear the strains of the band from the dance hall near, and I knew they were having a late night. A little breeze blew and rustled the leaves in the school playground. One or two late cars shone along the road, but they were soon gone, and mostly it was still as if everything was waiting.

'It must have been about half-past two when the queerest thing of the whole night happened, a thing I won't ever forget, the way maybe I'll be forgetting everything else.

'A man came along the street. I saw him plainly as he came round the corner, the way one sees a few people who catch the eye suddenly. He was tall, with bent shoulders; and he had a cap pulled down over his face, and a scarf round his neck. His coat was very ragged, and his shoes made a shuffling, sliding sound as he walked. He crossed the road towards me, and then I saw that the sole was nearly off one of the shoes, and that the other was tied together with a piece of string.

"The next thing, I saw him, to my astonishment, turn in and go up the steps of the house next door, which, like most of the houses in this street, is a private hotel. He stood in the doorway, so that I couldn't see him. But I heard him give a knock, not a loud knock and the door did not open. But I heard him speak.

"He said, "I want a bed for the night." Then he answered himself "You have no bed for me; you are full up." He went out of the gate and then in again at the next one, and knocked again. His knock sounded clear, for there was no one passing at the time. I leant out of the window, and heard his voice again.

"Have you a bed for the night?"

"We have no bed."

"You are an hotel, but you have no bed—all right. You are sorry, but you have no room."

"He went out muttering a little, and I stared after him bewildered, for I tell you it was the queerest thing to hear him answering his own questions before a door that had not opened. He went on again to a third hotel and there I was leaning right out of the window with my ear cocked. And it was the same talk he had with himself:

"I want a bed for the night."

"We have no bed."

"I am very tired."

"We have no bed."

"Is there no place for me to sleep?"

"We are sorry."

"With that he came out, his head thrust down on his chest, after giving one nod he crossed the street. He went and leaned by the railings at almost the same spot where the man and girl had stood talking. His shoulders were bowed and he was half-turned away from me. He stood there all alone in the silence for a long, long while, and if it were crazy itself he was, you couldn't but pity him. It must have been nearly an hour he stood there, for my heart was troubled by him, and I kept looking out

'Then the heavy steps of a policeman came round from above. It was only when he came up that the man seemed to notice, for he sort of stiffened. The policeman passed and the man watched him. Then the policeman turned, and came slowly back. He seemed as if he were going to speak to the poor man. But he went a little way past, and then turned and stared hard. And with that the man drew himself together and walked off, making down the road. The policeman stood looking after him till he turned the corner and was out of his sight. Then the policeman himself went off, and after a minute I couldn't see the poor, queer fellow any longer.

'I was thinking about him with sorrow for his homelessness, but almost immediately another comic thing happened.

'Another of those gay gentlemen who had stayed out very late celebrating something came along. When he got to the lamp-post opposite, he stopped dead and took out his watch. He looked first at his watch, and then he looked up at the light. He puzzled me at first, and then it came to me of a sudden that he thought the lamp was a clock, and he couldn't make out at all why it was that he couldn't see the time by it. I had to laugh out aloud at the thought of him making such an exhibition of himself, though, of course, he didn't hear me. At last he put the watch back in his pocket, shook his head as if he were giving up a bad job, and went on.

'What was the next? Oh, I remember! I stared across at a window a little way down the street. I looked at it, because there was a light in it, and I wondered to myself if there was anyone there who was sick like me, only much more so. For this asthma of mine is nothing very much at all. I thought of this person watching for the night to pass, and finding the hours very heavy.

'Then I must have lost myself a little, for it's the sound of taxis I hear next, and then a woman's scream comes, so that I look out of the window sharply to see what was happening.

It was the people coming out of the dance hall. They were in evening dress, and one or two were singing some song, and others laughing in the distance. One man was very drunk, or very ill, and had to be carried to the car that his friends had got. A woman came after him crying as if there had been some disturbance, and then another woman in a red silk shawl followed her, and put her hand on her arm, comforting her. They went out and started to walk down the street, then two men came after them and caught them up as they reached the corner of the road. For a few minutes they stopped and talked; one man kept waving his hands about as if he were explaining something in a very earnest way; then all the four went on together.

'Most of the others had cleared off by this time, and I thought that they had kept it up very late this time, for now everything was getting light, and the lamps looked dim. I looked at my watch and was surprised to find that it was nearly five in the morning, and I thought, "Well, in five-and-twenty minutes the street lamps will go out, and time too, for they are looking faded against the whitening sky." Then I remember I saw an old woman come along with a big sack. She stopped at our dustbin, and putting the sack down began to rummage among the things. She was particular, and indeed her sack was very full, for the only thing that I could see her take was a tin, and I wondered what use she would put that to. She doesn't mind about the one next door, though she stops a while lower down, but I don't bother looking at her, for by now I am feeling very tired and a little depressed some way. I wondered if I lay on my bed would sleep come.

'But I stayed on at the window, and I am glad I didn't go back to bed.'

The young girl stopped and laughed reminiscently, and I smiled back wondering what was coming next.

'Ah, sure, it's only a silly thing, I don't like to be telling you.'

'Go on,' I said, and she went on.



'Well, there was a great thundering rattle along the street, and it was the dustbin men in their cart. They seemed in great spirits when they stopped at the top of the street talking and laughing, so that I was cheered looking at them. Then they came on again and made their next stop here. When one man came to our dustbin, what should he see on top but a shoe from an old pair of ladies' slippers. He took it out and hugged it to him, rolling his eyes in the funniest way so that the other two men stood laughing at him. Then all of a sudden he saw me, and, pointing at the shoe, looked up to ask was it mine. I smiled and shook my head, but he looked as if disappointed and wanting me to say "yes." Well, he was not very young, but he had a nice smiling face. And so what did I do for a bit of devilment, but take a rose out of the vase on the table behind me and throw it out to him. Was that dreadful?'

'Not a bit,' I said. 'Why should it be?'

'Well, anyway, it fell into the area and the dustman made a great to-do rubbing his eyes, and rushing up to the railings, making as if he would throw himself after it. So I threw him another quickly, and this time he caught it and kissed it with great gallantry for all the world as if we were playing *Romeo and Juliet*. Then he put it into his buttonhole, and got back into the cart, which started off, for the others were waiting on him. And the very last I saw of him, there he still was, turned round towards me, blowing kisses and hugging the old slipper.'

We laughed together, and then I said, 'That must be near the end of the story.'

'Why so?'

'Because romance always finishes a story.'

'You could not call the like of that romance,' said the young girl. But she blushed a little. Then she went on quickly, 'Well, true enough, it was almost morning by then, for the workmen's tram came clanging along soon. And then in a short while there were the people going to early Mass, flitting along like shadows, with their heads down,

little women dressed mostly in black. In their footsteps were the early chars, with their black shiny bags well gripped, ready to take every scrap they could lay hands on. Then a woman came out of the house opposite, the one that had the light in the window all night, and began to clean down the steps in a quick way as if she didn't want anyone to see. When she'd gone in, a page-boy came out of the hotel next door, just in his shirt sleeves and trousers, and stood looking up and down and whistling; he and I watched a motor car and a few bicycles going past; then I said to myself, "Well, the whole city is waking up at last, and getting ordinary. So I'll tumble into bed."

'And high time, too, I should think,' said I.

## *On the Floor*

BY JOAN JUKES

(From *New Stories*)

BUT when I open the door I find someone has moved my chair. A flash of fierce anger passes through me, then I am calm again. I lean heavily on the door handle, change hands, and drag round my left foot, holding the door in my left hand and trying to sidle round it. I begin to slide, and the door scrapes up my spine. How wearisome if I am to be trapped here doing nothing! Yes, I am going, down, come down (for love is of the valley, come thou down and find it), let yourself go, fall gently, softly as a flake of snow — So! Did anyone hear me? Listen for a moment. No. I have been lucky again. The door is grazing my back, push it away. I am sitting on my right foot and it hurts. I must ease it, push it away, push hard! So! Now I am comfortable. Can I close the door and sit with my back against the wall? Yes. Someone may happen along in five minutes (or it may be an hour and a half). What can I do? Nothing. How can I amuse myself? I must meditate on the mutability of human affairs.

Five minutes ago I set out from the study to fetch a letter from the dining-room (not in a spirit of pride or arrogance, for I never walk like that, but none the less hoping for the best. A letter is so easy to carry. I can slip it in my shoulder-straps or down my neck). But someone had moved the chair. I steady up on three feet to the right, so it all came to nothing. The time, which was too short for what I wanted to do, will crawl past while I am sitting uncomfortably and impatiently on the floor. (But at least the summer has come. I won't be frozen.)

It is impossible to grovel along the floor and help myself to the most readable book on the most accessible shelf of the nearest bookcase, for I am in the dining-room. There are no bookcases, no shelves and no books. So there is nothing for

me to do I can indulge myself, then, by thinking about anything I like, for as long as I must stay here.

What did I dream last night? It was something ridiculous—I remember I laughed when I woke up. Oh yes, I was walking up a stair. Just went up like a snap of the fingers, perfectly simple. I knew there was something wrong somewhere, even while I was sleeping 'This is none of me' It is strange that I have begun to have dreams like this. The night before I thought I was threading a needle. I held it up firmly and steadily in my left hand, and pushed the thread straight through, quite casually, with my right nothing in it at all. Thread you another dozen while you wait My dreams were always like this a few years ago. I crawled about by day, but at night I was brisk and competent My dreams were lagging behind the truth But by this time they have dropped their pinch of salt on the tail of a feeble actuality, and I am as helpless by night as by day. They were slow to overtake, but they have done it now. They have overdone it. One night my dreams took me back twenty years or more I was a child again It was the Christmas Treat. We were all wearing our white dresses, and some of us had pink sashes. (I had no sash, but I had a blue ribbon on my hair.) We were going to dance the Hay-makers, we were all lined up in order, jumping with excitement, waiting for the piano to strike up I was not the first, some of the big girls had crowded in before me, but I was nearly at the beginning, so that I would have only a short time to wait and then it would be my turn to skip up the middle, trip round and dance down again. I could scarcely have patience till the music should begin—

Every night when I go home  
The monkey's on the table

Suddenly mother came up behind and tried to draw me aside to speak I wasn't going to go without some reason

given. 'You'd better not try this, dear,' she said. I was astonished and indignant. 'Why not?' I demanded, 'Why not?' She tried to lead me away without explaining, but I was stubborn, I would not have it, not likely. I jerked my shoulder and stood firm. 'Why not?' I insisted, exasperated, feeling sure that she couldn't have a word to say for herself. But her face was sad. 'You would keep the others back, dear,' she said gently. I gasped and choked with anger—what was this? Questions whirled in my head like bees in a hive. Keep them back! What was all this? What sort of a person was I? Do I or do I *not* keep people back? I tried to remember. Everything was confused. 'Do I keep people back?' so that I wakened, and remembered that I am that sort of person. I always keep people back. But what was all that nonsense about Haymakers? What had that to do with it? Nothing at all.

For until I was about twenty I was more or less like anybody else. I lived an ordinary life. Nothing much happened to me. I was insignificant and commonplace, and just such another as the duller among my neighbours. Then things began to change and they are altogether different now. Everyone notices me. I am a sensation. In any assembly or any house I am the most important person, just as Dr Johnson was, and no one grudges me my pride of place.

All my friends would rush along now if they knew I was here. When I fall noisily the house is in an immediate uproar. Doors are flung open in all directions to let people leap along passages or downstairs to where I am. They all call out to ask each other what has happened this time. 'Where is she? Who's with her?' I thought she was with you,' they shout reproachfully to each other, flying along. Someone jumps shamelessly out of the bathroom door and calls for reassurance, towelling vigorously. It gives a severe shock to everyone but me, and the whole subsequent evening is gloomy. But I have only one moment of terror, until I discover that I have a moderately safe spot for my forced landing.

And now I have no great wish to stay here all night I should like to cry out so that someone could come and pick me up and take me along where there was something to do But as soon as my voice was heard, the commotion would begin, and to-night there are visitors in the house They would look at each other with faces pale and horror-stricken when their hostess sprang from the room They would go home and tell their friends about the dreadful thing that had happened while they were in our house, whereas nothing has happened, nothing at all, except that I am sitting here on the dining-room floor, time is creeping past, and I have absolutely nothing whatever to do On an occasion like this I have sometimes tried to sing out for help in an unmistakably jaunty tone of voice to let everyone know at once that I am happy and carefree, I haven't lost an eye or broken a leg, but this attempt has never been successful, because through closed doors my gay halloo seems to pierce like a shriek of agony. The long-dreaded has happened, they think, their worst fears are realized, and the helter-skelter is wilder than ever.

They know I never hurt myself, however often I fall, at least, never badly, so what a ridiculous fuss! At first when I began to fall, my stockings were always torn and my knees bruised or cut But now I am never hurt. I am an acrobat in all but strength and agility. I bear a charmed life (But my charm is powerless beside an open fire. I have to admit that )

Very likely someone will come along soon and say, 'Hello, all right? Been there long? I'll bring your chair,' then I shall be flicked into it and wheeled off. Something like that will happen very soon.

I wonder how long it is since I saw a star? I don't know. It must be nearly ten years since I climbed a hill. We crossed the Pentlands one day from Balerno and walked through the dark elephant valley till we reached the hill above Pennycuik It was cold and a heavy rain was blowing. We climbed up slowly in the shelter of the hill, and when we reached the top, a snell blast of wind and rain struck flat across us, stung our faces, swept our breath away, and forced us to turn our

heads. We looked at each other and laughed. Then we began to scramble down in the teeth of it. When I got back, my landlady refused to clean my shoes. Nobody cleans my shoes now. There is no need. They are never dirty.

Well, I shall never climb up there again, never. But I don't want to. Sitting here on the dining-room floor, with nothing much to trouble me (except that I have nothing to do here, and there are many things I want to do, and life is so short, and, of course, I must keep moving my legs when they are cramped, and sometimes they jerk and a spasm passes through them so that the button on my shoe is pressed painfully into my foot), sitting quietly here, I cannot believe that climbing hills has ever given any pleasure to anyone. Only to think of it makes my brain reel and my legs ache.

And in any case, I was already rocky then. Life was often perplexing, and not very pleasant. I can remember that.

There was that surprising night when a lad in good faith walked with me to my lodgings, and was disturbed to find he had to help me to keep erect, which he had felt safe in assuming (or he might have put the snaffle on his gallant impulse) that Providence had enabled me to do for myself. Wondering gloomily, were my intentions honourable or were they perhaps not, he gave me all the assistance that seemed to be called for in the circumstances.

It was the darkness, of course, that made me reel and clutch for support. But I was stupid. I did not see that. I began to be afraid to walk alone at night. I knew I was far from steady. Yet I was surprised that night when I made my way in fear through some quiet dark streets. I lurched across a blind alley and threw myself against a railing which was strong, I could keep a firm hold of it. But I was surprised to hear a lady say I was just a young girl and a disgusting sight, since it was the first time it had happened. But it wasn't of any importance. I had a strong railing to cling to, and I clung to it. And even if I had left it, and, in a fury of self-justification, had staggered across to assure her (clutching

her firmly by the shoulders to keep me steady) that I could solemnly swear that I never touch a drop, she might not have believed me. My conduct might not have seemed to her a conclusive proof of my sobriety. But how often this sort of thing happened! It was only the first time that I noticed it particularly. I remember that time I had to change stations in Paris. I asked my porter to find a taxi. He said it was not worth the trouble. I am docile. I took his advice. I wavered into the darkness and swayed along at his heels. It felt like walking at the bottom of the sea. The lights of Paris waltzed and floated all together beyond the bridge. The bridge floated too. My porter turned now and then to watch my progress with interest. I believe he was thinking that it might have been worth the trouble after all.

At the time everything was uncertain and puzzling, but it is amusing to look back on it now. I can sit here and chuckle (moving my left leg over my right if my position becomes too unksome) when I remember that amazing Saturday morning. I set out to walk along Princes Street, to drift in the stream of loiterers, gay and elegant still as they were more than a century before, when Thomas Carlyle used to float leisurely through and take a turn with the general flood. I had done it so often. It was so pleasant. I joined the promenade at the Register House—that was where Carlyle turned to look back at Christopher North, striding impetuously along—and I walked on carelessly and confidently, glad to be there among all these people brighter and better than myself. Suddenly Jenners' shop window sprang towards me. I drew in my breath and stood still for a moment while it swung back slowly to its place. 'I must be cautious,' I told myself, and I proceeded more anxiously. But the windows grew bolder. They leaned over menacingly almost on top of me and then jerked back. They stepped up within an inch of my nose and invited me to walk through them. People were crowding in on me, and I had to get out of the way, but where was I to go? There was nowhere to go unless I plunged into the display window of a bootshop which had suddenly swerved



in front of my eyes. Then it drew back again, and I was able to creep past in the narrow space between the people who were bearing down on me, and the glass that, if I was not very careful, would lurch forward and smash into pieces all round me. So I must keep steady I must keep walking straight on, my attention keen and alert on the tiny patches of space left clear for me to walk on, as I threaded my way through, thinking about Macvittie's snack counter, and how there would be chairs there, scores upon scores of chairs, all empty, one would be enough, I would sit on one, the nearest one I had almost succeeded. I was almost there. None of the shop-gazers had laid me low I had escaped the murderous attacks of those sheets of plate glass. When lo, there separated itself from the forms and faces dancing before my glazed and dazzled eyes the figure of a man, a man I knew, a most agreeable man. He was coming forward to speak to me, what better could a girl want? The sight ought to have delighted me, and so, had things been right, it would have done, but now I could not stop. I lunged forward in grim determination, thinking of the chairs in Macvittie's snack counter waiting empty, and before long I would be sitting on one I must walk steadily and firmly up the step and through the crowded shop—let no one try to stop me—For he had thought, quite naturally and innocently, that he would have liked to linger and speak to me for a few minutes, but he did not understand. If he had realized that I could not have stopped, that I must have fallen into the window behind me or pitched forward to butt him in the stomach, or, in one way or another, landed him in some awkward situation he would prefer to be out of, he would not have been so eager to accost me. He would have kept himself at a safe distance if he had known what danger he was in. I plodded along earnestly, with steps very heavy and very flat, and arrived at the snack counter. There was an empty chair I reached it. I sat down in it. 'My aunt,' I said (or whatever mild oath I was in the habit of using at the time)

My body seemed to have a mind of its own. It was no longer trustworthy. But for some time I refused to accept this state of affairs, and issued commands which were ignored. I felt uncommonly silly. Sometimes I fell. I could give no explanation. Everybody looked surprised, but not more than I felt. I began to go through life apologetically and nervously. I remember striking my head against a lamp-post. I hoped none of my friends had noticed. I continued to converse with as much animation as I was mistress of, feeling that the bump was closing my eye.

Well, I need never live through that again. So I think as I sit awkwardly but tranquilly here on a hard floor, leaning against the wall, waiting for someone to come and pick me up. I pull up my right knee with both hands and push it with all my strength over my left, thinking that that sort of thing is over for good, thank Heaven. I need never live through it again.

Because afterwards things were easier. It was discovered that I could not be expected to behave normally. My condition was recognized. Medical men put their heads together and attached the appropriate label. They tested and punctured me, and examined into all the tricks I could and couldn't do. I hate to think how much I cared, and how desperately eager I was that they should find out what was wrong and put it quickly right. It is better to be as I am now, I think, when the worst any doctor could tell me about myself wouldn't, I hope, cost me a flicker of an eyelid. But I was uneducated then. I watched them earnestly and anxiously. Sometimes I noticed that one or another was very pleased. I thought I was as good as cured already. But this was a mistake. I found out afterwards that a sudden gleam of joy in the eye of a medical man—even a very kindly medical man—does not necessarily indicate that your prospects are dazzlingly bright, that he is about to mutter an incantation, perform a few magic passes and send you home in half an hour, fit as a flea. Nothing of the

kind! It only means that somehow—you do not understand it at all yourself—you have startlingly confirmed his provisional diagnosis. And the provisional diagnosis? That is a different story altogether.

They did very well by me. They did not put me off with a trifle. I was to be another Barbellion. They had not made a fool of me. I hate to think of my dismay when a doctor glibly referred to my paralysis—Barbellion didn't like the word either—or to the possible effect on my mind, or of my bitterness when I found that, instead of being grown-up and my own mistress, I was likely to be under tutelage until I died. I hate to think of it. But I am not so vulnerable now.

I have had wisdom and resignation thrust upon me; I should even be content to sit here with nothing to do, if the floor were not so hard, if I could reach that cushion—I can! I can wriggle across to the fireplace, pull over the cushion with the tongs, then I can lie and rest my head on it—Good, I have done that. I have all the helplessness of a child without its charm or promise, but I have a higher degree of intelligence—so I think complacently—in relation to my physical powers. And I am more restrained. I do not yell and scream till I am attended to. I lie quietly here with my head on the cushion which my own ingenuity has procured for me, remembering all that has ever happened to me.

I can remember how I used to walk across the Park to see my friends. I can see myself setting out now. I step out cautiously from the front gate and stop, keeping my head still, for a jerk would upset me, while I see and feel that there are no cars or bicycles (but of course there are none—how could there be any?) crawling in this quiet street. Then I must step off the kerb, and, now that I have learned how to do this under my new disabilities, it is quite simple. I plant my stick firmly in the roadway and lean some of my weight on it. Then, keeping my eyes wide open so as to see everything and look at nothing, I slowly transfer my feet from the kerb to the causeway. The houses shudder slightly meanwhile, but the spasm dies away when I set off on level

ground to a light regular jolt at each footstep. The walk to the Park gates is calm and secure. The footpath is not broken or irregular. There is a railing on my right hand, and in my left I have a stick. Nothing can happen unless I am careless and look too intently at something without remembering that my balance depends on my eyes. There is someone across the street looking at me. I might stop and hold my railing and peer across, contorting my face into some sort of a grimace if I think I can see a smile, but I prefer to keep straight on. It can be no one who knows me, because anyone who knew me would cross the street to speak to me. It is someone who has never seen me before, and who is admiring the strikingly individual way I manage my legs, as any must do who see it. So I stumble on. But when I have reached the Park gates the world already is not such a good place as it was five minutes before. The skies have darkened. The birds are not singing, or if they are I wish they would stop. I have left my railing and am walking across the asphalt walk, but it is unruly. It tilts up before the toe of my shoe. I have to lift my foot high and then press it down. There are seats in the Park. I should like to sit on one of them until the ground was quieter and stopped heaving up and trying to throw me forward, but, because of the stupidity or malice of the members of the Town Council—I would like to see them all lying stone dead—the wooden seats have not been fixed close to the walks. I should have to cross a stretch of rough tufted grass before I reached them, and six yards of uneven ground is three score and ten miles afoot with me. There is a seat over there bobbing up and down just on the far side of my restricted field of vision. If I could only reach it safely and sit there, I should have no troubles any more. I would never get up again. I would shut my eyes and think about nothing. And if it rained, what would it matter? It would mean I had no choice. I should have to sit still. For if I tried to walk when it was raining, my stick would slip on the wet surface and the rain would flow in my eyes and blind me. Sooner or later I

should fall. So I would sit still on the wooden seat, rain or fine, if I could only get there, but I can't I must keep walking on over this switchback, trying to keep it down and force it to lie still and flat under my footsteps, because of the spiteful tricks of that gang of misbegotten scoundrels on the Council, who are not fit to live, but no worse—Steady! steady! where the ground begins to slope down. Don't let it fling me on my face!—not worse in any respect than all the other people in the world, who walk about quickly, in order, if they can, to knock someone down.—All, that is, except the people I am going to see, who have a strong arm-chair in their hall, quite near the front door. There are plenty of strong ledges and door handles for me to hold firmly, and there is nothing horrible about their house. They have no highly-polished floors with impassable skin rugs which tangle up my feet and slide away. They have no glass cabinets or china vases or bowls or plaster casts. Nothing is lying about for me to smash. I needn't go near their glass bookcase. I have just this one step to go up, holding on to the trellis, and then very soon, very soon—she is opening the door to help me in; she saw me coming; in a moment I shall be sitting down. But she is so slow, she is so stupid, she takes my hand and says trivial irrelevant things about my health and the weather, instead of pressing on with me towards the chair. Let me push on into the hall. There! now I see what has happened! My face is hot, but it flushes again with anger.—No wonder she was ashamed!—They have cozened and beguiled me! They have moved away the chair! I must make straight for the study. I can no longer believe in anyone. She even makes to delay me further by pretending to help me off with my things. But I edge past her. I am like Proust's grandmother in the Champs Élysées. I don't care if my hat is on or off, or straight or squint. It is nothing. I shall reach the stair-rails and then to the study. Did I enjoy my walk through the Park? Humbug. I only want to sit down and close my eyes without falling and let my feet and my legs rest. There! I knew it!

He has come out of the study! He is standing at the door on purpose to delay me, saying how pleased he is to see me—sneering, vindictive hypocrite! Asking me to his house, standing talking about tulips in the Park, and not letting me sit down! If I could only strike him down, smash him! Stand clear, on your life!—by heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me—stand clear! stand clear!—Heaven's blessing be on him He has helped me to a chair, comfort and ease flow through my legs In my heart are peace and good-will Yes, take off hats and scarves, anything, as much as you like and can I don't concern myself about that

Well, I need never walk about outside again That laboursome and dangerous business is over and done with. I can forget it all now But I wish someone would come along I have a cushion, but it is maddeningly tedious, doing nothing. I must do something If there were anything within reach I would break it or throw it on the floor, but there is nothing. I can do nothing

What about the dictionary? A little dictionary is lying on the sideboard. I had forgotten it. I could wriggle along for the poker, then I could knock the dictionary down from the sideboard. (In form and moving how express and admirable!) But really it is not worth the trouble. I might ruin my clothes. And then a dictionary is like a baby. Even a very little one is awkward to handle.

Still, I could do that if I chose I soothe my stiff knees and reflect that I am lying here in idleness which is not enforced but voluntary. I could do that, I think complacently, and with ease

It is wonderful what we can do I knew a woman in hospital once who was ticketed like me and Barbellion. We said, 'Hello, twins,' and compared notes Her legs were quite useless to her, but she said she was a good cook. 'And how—?' I asked. She rolled about on the floor—we cannot crawl, our knee-jerks are too strong—and carried what she wanted from the cupboard to the stove Her little daughter

helped her, but she would be five soon and go to school. What would happen then?

While she was telling me how she could sit on the floor and lift pans of boiling water from the stove, she laughed till she cried. I laughed too. We both laughed. I believe the doctors call our laughter symptomatic, but I think we have moved round the corner of life, and now we can see the funny side. The ordinary man takes himself quite seriously and forgets how ridiculous he is in his grotesque body. Every mechanical device encourages him to deny its puny absurdity. He is lulled into a solemn complacency because taps, switches and door handles are always exactly where he can reach them. He walks about like a god. But it is different with us. We are never likely to forget that we have an unwieldy and capricious yoke-fellow. Our minds work differently from other people's. Can I go to that concert? (This is the sort of thing we ask ourselves.) Why not? Everyone will help me to get there. I need only sit still. Yes, but—suppose my foot began to tap quickly in the middle of the Adagio. Suppose everyone turned round to scowl at me and say 'Sh!' And suppose it wouldn't stop then. And then again, I wish that lady wouldn't stand so near me. I don't know that I'm going to kick her, but I can't possibly know that I'm not. We are always thinking in this way. And then I'm very sorry, sir, that my foot is blocking your passage, and I mean to use any little influence I have to remove it, but I advise you to trust to your own exertions, and not to rely on me. Shove it out of the way. Just like a mother who knows very well how ill-behaved her children are, and who takes them into company with anxious apprehensions. It is a ludicrous situation. We cannot help laughing. We have bitten into the very core of laughter.

When first I began to fall, and did so suddenly and unexpectedly, with a crash, it was my eyes I always thought of first, for Braille would be difficult for my numb fingers. And so it does not surprise me that John Milton found the

loss of his sight no subject for laughter. But my twin laughed loudly when she told me how she did the cooking. She laughed uproariously. The other patients called to her to shut up.

Now that I look back on it, I can see that she ought to have had a chair like the one I use indoors. Only a slight pull, and it goes wherever you want, skimming over the floors and turning corners like magic. But the other day it let me down, and that would be awkward for her when she was alone. I jerked it. It keeled over, and flung me in the coalbox. But once again fortune smiled on me. I was wearing a sleeveless frock, and when my arms and face were sponged, I was clean again. No need for the weariness of changing my clothes.

I travel in a bath chair now. I can set most of the shocks that flesh is heir to at defiance. I am unruffled and serene. I can progress at a comfortable walking speed without any exertion at all, without any anxious calculations about the next ledge to cling to, and whether it will bear my weight, and traffic problems concern no one less than me. A great deal depends, of course—I am reluctantly obliged to remember this drawback about my bath chair—on the discretion of the driver. I had a maid to pilot me once. She was buoyant and vigorous. She would charge me into unoffending pedestrians, and before I could apologize I was borne off, waving my hands in my helpless eagerness to communicate, till I found I had nipped the next victim in the legs. Then one lady, quite unscrupulous, pulled me backwards, all unwitting, into a butcher's shop. I was suffocating with the smell of blood. I was surrounded with carcasses. I was shaking hands with the butcher, and responding to his civilities—but very briefly, because from a woman in a bath chair one remark is as good as another. Every attention is given to her, but nothing much is expected in return. I mumbled into my handkerchief. He thought I was an imbecile. He would have thought that no matter what I had said.



Another day they all went down to the end of a strange, steep garden to buy tomatoes. They parked me at the top, lovely, full of shrubs, flowers, and sweet odours. But when I turned round there was a beehive at my elbow! Bees were swarming all round me. They didn't like it. Nor did I. But I couldn't do anything about it. Nor could they, and I hoped they would accept this fact quietly, and they did! We agreed to tolerate each other, and before very long I was wheeled off.

I still shudder when I think about one of my experiences. I was sitting in my chair by a railway bookstall, watching my friends attending to the tiresome duties I am now happily relieved of. I thought I was secure, but suddenly the chair was dislodged, we leapt forward, heading full tilt for the railway line and the oncoming train. Among the desirable sudden deaths I had turned over in my mind, meeting a train in my bath chair was not a favourite. I drew in my breath, half wailing, and shrank back. Would someone stop me? I was flying faster, I was in despair; I saw my friends coming, but they could not possibly be in time, they were sauntering unconcerned. I was almost over the edge—suddenly I turned and bowled along parallel to the line. Of course, someone was propelling me. How stupid I had been! But who on earth? I twisted my neck round. It was a porter. He had been directed to collect the baggage, and asked no leave of either me or the suit-cases. In a bath chair I am not taken seriously as an individuality at all.

For the most part I am even invisible. I might not have discovered this if I had not read about Stevenson. Women always looked at him—so he says, and I can well believe it—until he wore a shabby suit and neglected to shave. Then they did not see him. He had not noticed their glances till they were all at once withheld. Then he realized that he had become 'invisible to the well-regulated female eye'. Without any means of determining whether any eye that had ever fallen on me was well-regulated or not, I none the less discovered when I went out in a bath chair that something of the same kind had happened to me. While I had walked

about like my neighbours, I had been accustomed, like my neighbours, to be glanced at by the casual passer-by, before he decided that for grace and beauty he must look elsewhere. But no one glances at me now, I have the recipe of fern seed. Except to the aged and infirm I am invisible.

But no, not always. Sometimes a surly-looking stranger catches sight of me, and brings an offering of all the best blooms in his garden. The spectacular part of patient sufferer is one I never thought to have been cast for, and after years of practice I still play it badly, but my fellow actors are so quick to take their cues that my own botched performance passes tolerably well.

I am an invalid. I can't walk. I have no other characteristics. People never speak of me as 'such and such a person, addicted so and so,' but they say 'That little invalid, you must have noticed her going past in her chair.' The reply is 'Oh, yes, I've often wondered who she was.'

How long did it take me—I move my legs and rub my left arm—how long was it before I found out that a live dog is better than a dead lion? Truth to tell, I never was a lion, but what of that? A rabbit can be just as dead. For although there is a great fluster and to-do wherever I go, I am really not of any account now.

I have no enemies worth speaking about. When I was able to walk there were plenty of people who never felt any the better for seeing me. However, as soon as I was obviously done for, my enemies all cleared. They scurried off like rats from a sinking ship. I saw one of them once. We had been at school together. She had hated me well. No one could give me a better setdown. It is monotonous to be perpetually lapped in loving-kindness, and never to be braced by a stiff breeze of antagonism, so, when I saw her, and my nostrils caught, as I thought, a welcome whiff of hostility, I was glad, and I hobbled along hopefully to meet her. But it was no good. As she turned to look at me, the lines of her face softened, and her eyes grew moist with pity. 'I was terribly sorry to hear—' she began. '*Et tu,*

*Brute.*' I limped away, crestfallen. My enemies, base deserters, have left me in the lurch.

But I grow kinder myself. For who am I to judge harshly the frailties of my fellow-man? My own vices—they are closely circumscribed, it is true—are never so designated, vanity and impudence are now counted to me for grace, and none of my sins are ever laid to my charge. Affection and indulgence are become my daily bread. So I lie here, half asleep, the hard floor rubbing on my bones, and feel no anger against anyone—except people who make me stand, or move my shoes out of reach, or pretend to help me along and pinch my arm, and some people pull me and hurt me and knock me about when I have fallen, making the excuse that they are trying to help me to rise.

I hate those people. But just now it is not of any moment. I only wish someone would come and pick me up. I am so tired of lying here.

## *The Beginning*

BY MERVYN LAGDEN

(From *Life and Letters*)

THERE were so many animals in the wood that the ground echoed with unseen feet and every leaf stirred with hidden life underneath. Motion would be in the fox swaying across the fields, fear in the vanishing scuts under the hedgerows, passion in the throaty call of a bird, and pity in the soft eyes of a squirrel contemplating the nut between its fingers. But the real life of the wood was underground. It teemed, it crawled, it sweated from the pores of the earth in an insistent stream.

'Come under and see,' it cried. 'We live and are the beginning of you who walk.'

Creeping in under the moss, the sound of myriad voices lapped round. Delicate ground spiders waved transparent legs, free of earth, like tiny emotions stammering their way out of chaos. Tremendous worms, which could never have had a beginning, churned a way to the surface and ironed out invisible wrinkles in the mould. Minute creatures, which might one day fly or swim, oozed between bosky fragments and mated without stop. In the roots of the primroses small wiry serpents nested, ready to be withdrawn with the root.

The persistent creeping suggested a fearful pregnancy and at the same time exuded death. From under the ground, the tremulous leaves, and the mould blanket, stole out an aroma of dying. The body became one with earth atoms and was eaten by the tireless worms.

This penetration of death into the living did not content itself with the ground. It rose into the bodies of animals and the figures of men.

In a weltering red field a mass of ewes stood swathed in muddy fleeces, their withers and buttocks straddling in the sticky loam. Lambs toppled on hoofs clogged out of shape

with mud. The pen hedged in the pangs of both, yet each sheep, as it lay down, yielded to the ground folding its woollen limbs as if in death.

Two fields away, men ploughing had no separate identity. In the half distance the shepherd, walking away from the fold, drew his feet slowly out of the earth as if they had no volition of their own and could not be parted from the soil. The sway of his limbs was in the drive of the rain-cloud overhead, and his waist and thighs undulated with the field against which he was outlined. At any moment he would sink into the brown crust to which he had already resigned himself.

In these surroundings sat an old couple, hugging to them what was left of life within the four walls of their cottage. The rhythmical wobble of the old man's chin and head, his fingers as he felt for snuff, seemed to be finishing out a tune that was too difficult for him. One bandaged leg had already entered into decay and was slowly drawing him with it under the stone floor. Only the bright white side-whiskers flinging his pink cheeks and the shrill blue of his eyes explained the manhood still there. His glances bestowed on food and drink the interest once given to other things.

His wife, a network of wrinkles over her face proclaiming her shrivelled body, had become, though she still stood, a portion of the background. Her hips and the framework of her limbs had passed with the action of living into the walls and, through them, to earth. Her hands waved with faint movements like old boughs, and the few steps she took were pushed out of her by the flag-stones—more alive than she.

Cupped between the two old people was a bowl of mutual experience. Their thoughts, escaped for ever from them, were trapped in the limits of each other. When had they stopped thinking? Sometime, long ago, before old age had covered their bodies. They did not see each other as they were—the clock of their minds had stopped with the hands still pointing to midday instead of evening.

She saw him as the active male who slouched off day after day to work, content to curl his crook round the ewes' grey legs and draw out lamb after lamb into the air. He was still looking down red with pride and anxiety at their first child. For her, lying weakly on the bed, the baby in his arms had made a completed picture of her life. She had been thankful to him for what he had given her without any consciousness of giving. Her other children had been welcome, but none had given her the same intense happiness. She was a cat, too delighted to leave its basket of kittens for more than a second; a bitch with a bellyful of puppies whose legs grew strong too quickly; a mare whose eyes could never leave the young foal coming to her to be licked and nuzzled. Even when her eldest son grew up she had not been able to part with the possessiveness he roused in her. To stroke his neck or to have him ill and at her mercy, restored him at once to her as a baby cradled into her side.

Although she did not know it, time had stopped for her husband at the same moment—when work and fatherhood had been fused. Toil in the fields, tired thighs driving their muscles on past weariness, and the toil of getting children, were intermingled. The day his child was born he had stayed working in a field near his cottage till a neighbour rushed out to call him. He always remembered what he had been doing, chopping fiercely at stakes and twisting the hard, obstinate withies along in between till, bit by bit, a close basketwork of hedgerow grew up under his fingers. He had worked so furiously that his hands had been torn and blood had stained the white spear-heads of the withies for weeks after.

When he went in, he had looked everywhere but at the bed. He had noticed the strong light coming through the window, and the straight legs of the chairs with shaped feet he had never seen before. Kneeling by the bed he had kept his head bent towards the floor, his eyes travelling up and down the trailing sheet like a strange land. He found his fingers clutching a wisp of torn bark from the hedge, and

there was blood on the outside of his hand. His mind said over and over again the words of the only hymn he knew by heart—

‘While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground’—

weighing the accents of the music. He knew that he grew out of the woman on the bed, like the sapling he so often cut down out of the earthbed. Over her, in her, round her his legs towered up, his manhood springing from the safe feeding soil.

In a daze of prayer he had looked into his wife’s country eyes, accepting her labour like a happy worn-out animal.

Time before and after this had been dimmed. The other events in his memory had blended into pleasant streams of life. Hundreds of evenings, when the taste and smell of his pipe by the fire had been good, made one continuous evening. The spring mornings, when he went up the hillside with his sacking over his shoulders and his crook in his hands, had telescoped into one polished morning—like an apple on which his hand rested. Nights in the inn with steaming clothes, the reek of beer and sawdust and the buzz of cheerful voices, had steeped themselves into one brew which he could now drink at a mouthful. The bickerings and triumphs of his children and grandchildren were a long strip of pattern rather than single recollections. Accidents and love-affairs and quarrels dove-tailed into each other—like the dusk closing up the difference between open country and woodland.

But now through the closing walls of his ears and the stupor of the past he heard voices. He saw his wife stir reluctantly as if wrenched out of a dream. The son who had been his first child came into the cottage, followed by a tall woman with an almost new-born baby, and by three other children. He could not see them distinctly; they were shapes blowing in from the outside. The children were

daffodils, bobbing on their stalks, primroses with upturned faces. The dew from the ground hung over all the party, making it unreal. Out of the cobweb of his life hung these spiders, shaking the frail net, unable to break it but stretching it painfully.

The old woman, kissed boisterously by her son and daughter, was repelled by their firm cheeks and lips. She resented them except as memories as she drooped forward over the table edge, head resting on nerveless hands. The feel of her own cheek was so different. It was herself loose, hanging, meagre. She did not want the radiancy and bloom any more.

Voices eddied round her. The new baby had come to see them both. He weighed eight pounds—a monster. He was to be christened in a week and they would call him after his grandfather. Hands lifted the kettle she found so heavy, and filled it; feet clattered up and down the floor she found so endless; the door which took her time to reach kept opening and shutting as one or the other went out or came in. Presently she heard the suck suck of a baby's lips, so distinct and so close it made her think it was at her own breast. She had no strength to look and see.

The hot tea was in her throat, reviving her muscles and lifting the cold wave in her brain. Cup in hand, she looked wonderingly round at all the people sitting there till her eyes came to rest on the baby. It was lying on the middle of its mother's lap as if it had just been born. It was brightest pink and its fist was rubbed into its wet, dribbling mouth—turned eternally upwards. The old man was bending forward over it, prodding gently at it with his finger while his knees shook with the effort and his toothless mouth smiled.

She too bent. Wizen'd figures, concentrated on the new life. Alone out of their children round them, they recognized the baby. Together they picked him out of their thoughts, where he had been all the time. They nodded over him, two ashy grasses stooped over a green shoot, doddering in the



wind and unconscious of larger growths. Neither knew what the other felt. They were too close to eternity; but, out of the haze behind them stepped the picture of the baby, framed so that even their eyes could see it.

After what might have been hours of happy apathy, broken into only by an occasional shrill voice or a scraping chair, all was quiet. The old couple were alone again. The door had closed—shut in on them, and the silence in the cottage faded into the silence in their ears. One each side of the fire, they sat on into the dark; safe in four walls, draining down into the stone floor, drawn out into the night.

Passing by the cottage, a man paused and listened. There was no sound. The walls grew up into the pressure of the darkness like a shell holding its dried seeds. As he brushed the stone sides, the man felt the whole building would crumble away into the ground. From round the garden the cold worms and slugs and the teeming insects clamoured to get in. Eating life from the earth was waiting to gnaw into the old flesh and bone and make it one again with the beginning.

## *A Change of Mood*

BY OLIVIA MANNING

(From *New Stories*)

WHEN she left the shop at half-past six she saw Harry Westman waiting on the kerb. She caught her breath and a little pain darted through her lungs as he turned and saw her and came slowly towards her

'Thought perhaps you'd come out to tea, and go to the pictures,' he said casually. The fingers of his coarse, ineffectual hands were dark with nicotine. As she stood trying to think of something to say, he blew a stream of cigarette smoke into her face. Her heart thumping, she stammered:

'I'm going to the dentist at seven o'clock.' Even as she spoke she knew that in her desperate nervousness she had blundered. What a fool to mention that appointment! She could easily postpone it. Should she say, 'How silly of me—that's to-morrow night.' She struggled between fear of losing this opportunity and the desire to show him she was not overwhelmed by the invitation. She knew well enough he had called for her on his half-day, only because Katie Hardwick had failed to keep a 'date' with him. Yet this had been an opportunity, and she had probably lost it. What could she say? But then the miracle happened

'Won't be at the dentist's all night, will you?' he said.

'No. Oh, no. Not more than an hour—if that.'

'All right, come along and get tea, and I'll call for you at eight o'clock.'

Her face grew hot as she strove to appear as though this sort of thing happened to her every day. He sauntered along, and she dared not hurry him. When they took their places in the cheap café he lounged back indifferently, murmuring occasionally when she paused in her efforts to make conversation. Her face burned, her fingers trembled, her pleasure was an agony so intense it was torment. If only he had warned her, she could have worn her best coat and hat and thus

fortified she might have braved the ordeal. But had he had time to warn her, he would have had time to warn someone quicker of wit, flashier, altogether more desirable, and she would not have been called upon. She realized he had called for her only because he knew he risked no rebuff. But she pretended to herself that this was not so. She must ignore insult.

Looking out of the window behind his head, she saw the last lights of the silken, summer evening battling with the faint, new-lit street-lamps. Usually such an evening—subtle, autumn delaying, prelude to adventure that never came—plucked painfully at her imagination, hurt her with a sense of frustration. To-night, because he was there, she felt vindicated. Beauty was powerless to hurt her. But she paid for her vindication with shame on shame, and above all was an irritation because she must see the night's beauty whilst he so obviously did not see it. She hated her difference from him. It was this dreaming and emotional visualization of things commonplace to others that made her an outsider. She must hide herself, pretend to be other than she was. She must not let him know how much she read, that it awed her to look at some pictures, that some music carried her beyond reach of things. After all, what had been her material gain from those things? Nothing. All her old friends were marrying whilst she spent her evenings sitting alone. And she was getting older: every second older, older. One day she would realize she was a lonely old maid. That was her dread. She cursed the shyness that kept her tongue-tied and almost friendless, yet she often told herself that she could interest a man as well as could any other girl. Well, here was her opportunity! What could she talk about? He was interested only in motor-cycles—but what was there to say about them? Before she could think of anything he was throwing down money to the waitress and they were leaving the shop with scarcely a word spoken.

He slouched along on the inside of the pavement, his hands in his pockets, a cigarette hanging from his mouth.

All the girls thought him awfully good-looking. There was something fascinating and almost sinister about his indifference and reputation for vanity, selfishness and bad temper. They felt it would be an achievement to bring him to heel. None but Katie Hardwick had held his interest for longer than a week and now she, dazzled by success, had dared break an appointment with him and even to pass him arm-in-arm with Joey Briggers. Annoyed and striving to annoy her, he had turned away with a cynical smile. He didn't give a damn for her—but he'd show her. She had said the only film she wanted to see was at the Ridgeway. She would be there with Joey, and he too would be there with someone—it didn't matter who. Whilst these sullen thoughts passed through his mind she tried hard to talk about motor-cycles.

'This girl is going to be a nuisance,' he thought, 'plain, dull, always blushing. Keen about me, I suppose, like all the rest of 'em. Well, I'll give her a night out that she'll boast about for months.' And suddenly conscious of his generosity, he began to say Yes and No instead of grunting.

At the dentist's gate she left him reluctantly, never daring to hope he would return for her. Suddenly she made to run after him and pretend the dentist was out. But she took only one step. Pride held her. She rang the bell.

In the waiting-room she felt a sense of anticlimax. A short, square-built, red-haired man came in, and her impatience crystallized into frigid anger. She was used to the gentle, old dentist, and disliked this very young, sharp-edged assistant.

'A filling, isn't it?' he asked briskly, and seated her in the red plush chair before she could speak. If she had been quicker she might have insisted on returning another day when the old dentist would be in attendance. But did she leave she would have to wait an hour outside the house in case . . . just in case. She might as well have the tooth filled now and finished with. She lay back and lapsed into a dream in which she left the surgery to find Harry Westman

waiting for her, and she, of a sudden, become irresistible to him. When they parted he asked her when he might see her again, and she said: 'What about Thursday?' And he said: 'Oh, sooner than that.' And she said, 'Well, Wednesday, then, and not a moment before.' He begged, but she was adamant. The dream proceeded to Wednesday, and she was still irresistible and he enthralled. Then she consented to see him on Saturday—pay-day and her half-day and what should have been her day of days, but in reality was only a day more lonely because longer than the rest. By this time everyone knew she was Harry Westman's girl and . . . and

a sharp, thin pain. The young man's hands were working at her mouth, his intent, pale face frowned two inches from hers.

He was scraping between two front upper-teeth. After the first twinge merely a suggestion of pain remained. If he prodded much more this suggestion of pain would become real pain. It irritated her, agitating her nerves and rousing her from the indifference wrought by her former excitement. Why couldn't he leave well alone? This was going to hurt. She felt him assailing her resistance; he would break through and hurt her. She squinted down at the needlepoint and shuddered. How cruel it was, and with such a cold, dispassionate cruelty! He broke away a piece of the decay and touched the sensitive, inner core. The pain glanced like a point of electricity through her nerves. She felt broken beneath this rigid agony. Her lips twisted into a tetanus grin, saliva spurted up from under her tongue. She could not keep back a little panic cry not only of present pain but of anticipated pain, she felt a sudden perverse desire to shriek, a warning that he could not hurt her indiscriminately. She held her breath.

'Hurt you?' he asked in a bright, disinterested way. He was not aware of her as a woman. She was merely a patient with a decaying tooth. He was like an automaton—with his efficiency and his quick, bright, 'Hurt you?'

His hand touched her face very gently, a mere brushing of

the delicate golden hairs of his hand across her flesh. She trembled deep within her bowels and felt weak as if some virtue had gone out of her. She lay very lax and quiet. The thought of Harry Westman, her excitement and hope for his return were forgotten as she lay in a half swoon, trembling voluptuously.

'I'll have to cut it a bit. Won't hurt much.' His voice cut her harshly. It was as though something cold had touched her and awakened her to consciousness of herself as an individual.

Who was it that had trembled at the sight of Harry Westman and striven to fit herself to the mould she felt most attractive to him? Not herself. This was herself roused to antagonism, brought hard against the hard, sharp-edged personality of this little dentist. He moved away. She sat upright, frigidly herself, watching him test the old-fashioned drill with his foot and try the point against his finger. His hands were white and finely cut, very quick and sharp moving. Those fine hands, guiding the instrument, were going to hurt her. Behind them was the fine, diamond-hard, diamond-clear and dispassionate brain, indifferent to her hurt. Her fear was sensual, half lust, as she relaxed into the chair again, abandoned to him.

First he thrust a roll of cotton wool under her lip. How ugly she must look with her lip protruding and her mouth screwed up! The pain was sharp and terrible. One never imagined that there could be in one's living body so concentrated a point of agony. In her foot or hand it would have been tolerable. But it was in her head, so near her brain that its poignance was inhuman. And it was exasperating. It seemed to her the energy of her whole body was being used to make this point of pain. A sour saliva spurted up beneath her tongue.

He raised the needle but the pain did not go. It lingered with chill bitterness round her mouth, making her feel exasperated, disagreeable, physically hungry. She could taste metal. She wanted to put something warm and

pleasant into her mouth. How disgusting was this dry, itching cotton wool which stuck to her gums and thrust her lips outwards. He thought nothing of making her so ugly. He was thinking only of the job in hand. He probably did not realize he hurt her.

As the pain glanced suddenly more fiercely through her mouth she wanted to cry out. But she would not. She was afraid of hearing again that bright, hard enquiry: 'Hurt you?' Oh, no. Let him hurt! The callous beast! She hated him because he hurt her dispassionately. There was no cruelty in him, no brutality. He had the finesse, the self-absorption of the artist. She felt him frigid, white, mathematical as pure thought. For all his sharp brightness he had a tranquillity, the symmetry of logic, an inevitableness like that of a mathematical problem. His surface was like metal, quite unliving and unreal as one counts physical reality; and behind it one felt his brain working, bright, hard and implacable.

Suddenly she was filled with a fury against him. She felt a wild desire to bite his hand. It was against her lips again. As quickly as it had risen, the fury died. She opened and shut her eyes, feeling her lashes drag against his flesh. Was he aware of them? She looked at him, but his face was intent. The electric light formed a halo behind his head; the red hairs of his frowning brows met over his nose, giving his face a childish, sulky look. His lips were caught in a thin, straight line, and he kept thrusting his nostrils open with a sort of eager effort. His eyes were quite expressionless until he lifted the drill again; and then a light of satisfaction flickered in them.

All the decay was cut out. She relaxed. He left her as if he were leaving something of his own making, but she knew it was only his handiwork that he was leaving.

He did not speak. The old dentist used to chatter all the time. But now the room was silent save for the scrape of an instrument as he mixed the filling. She knew how intent his face must be as he stood somewhere in the dimness behind

her, and as she lay back luxuriously with half-closed eyes, she felt a deep satisfaction in his absorption. She felt in sudden sympathy with it. That was how one should live—not forever harried by self-disgust, by fantastic hope and inevitable disappointment, but absorbed in one's skill and content with one's skill.

As she put on her hat she raised her upper lip and looked at her front teeth. The black mark between them was gone; they had become whole again. That was work well done.

The dentist opened the door and held out his hand. She felt his cold confident fingers grip hers. Still no interest in her womanhood; but her antagonism was gone, dissolved in this new understanding, this new-born sense of comradeship. He closed the door quickly. She knew he returned at once to his work.

Without surprise, with only a certain contemptuous impatience, she saw Harry Westman slouch out of the shadows, his cigarette hanging from his mouth, his whole body slack and impotent.

He did not come forward or even look at her. He waited indifferently for her to come to him.

She stood still for an instant, undecided. Then she turned and walked away from him, home.



## *Michael's Wife*

BY FRANK O'CONNOR

(From *Lovat Dickson's Magazine and Story*)

### I

THE station—it really is only a siding with a shed—was empty but for the station-master and himself. When he saw the station-master change his cap he rose. From far away along the water's edge came the shrill whistle of the train before it puffed into view with its leisurely air that suggested a trot.

Half a dozen people alighted and quickly dispersed. In one who lingered and looked up and down the platform he recognised Michael's wife. At the same moment she saw him, but her face bore no smile of greeting. It was the face of a very sick woman.

'Welcome, child,' he said, and held out his hand. Instead of taking it, she threw her arms about him and kissed him on the cheek. His first impulse was to discover if anyone had noticed, but almost immediately he felt ashamed of the thought. He was a warm-hearted man, and the kiss silenced an initial doubt. He lurched out before her with the trunk, while she carried the two smaller bags.

'Tis a long walk,' he said, with embarrassment.

'Why?' she asked wearily. 'Can't I drive with you?'

'You'd rather have McCarthy's car, but 'usn't back from Cork yet.'

'I would not. I'd rather drive with you.'

'Tis no conveyance,' he said, referring to the old cart. Nevertheless he was pleased. She mounted from behind and sat on the trunk. He lifted himself in after her, and they jolted down the village with the bay on their left. Beyond the village they turned off the road and climbed a steep hill. Through a hedge of trees the bay grew upon the sight with a wonderful brightness because of the dark canopy of leaves.

On and up, now to right, now to left until the trees ceased, the bay disappeared over the brow of a hill, and they drove along a sunlit upland road with sunken fences. Hills like mattresses rose to their right, a brilliant green except where they were broken by clumps of furze; a bog, all brown with bright pools and tall grey reeds, flanked the road. She seemed to take it in with unseeing eyes.

'Ye were in about eight, I'd say,' he commented, breaking the silence.

'Oh, yes. About that.'

'I seen ye.'

'You did?'

'I was on the look-out. When she rounded the Head I ran in and told the wife, "Your daughter-in-law's coming." She nearly kilt me when she seen 'twas only the ould liner.'

The girl smiled wearily.

'Look round you now and you'll see something,' he added proudly.

She half-raised herself on the edge of the cart and looked in the direction his head indicated. The land dropped suddenly away from beneath their feet, and the open sea, speckled white with waves and seagulls' wings, stretched out before them. The hills, their flanks patterned with the varying colours of the fields, flowed down to it in great unbroken curves, and the rocks looked very dark between their wind-flawed brightness and the brightness of the water. In little hollows nestled houses and cottages, diminutive and quaint, and mostly of a cold, startling whiteness that was keyed up here and there by the spring-like colour of fresh thatch. In the clear air the sea was spread out like a great hall with all its folding doors thrown wide, a dancing-floor, room beyond room, each narrower and paler than the last, till on the farthest reaches steamers that were scarcely more than dots jerked to and fro as on a wire.

Something in the strange fixity of the girl's pose made Tom Shea shout the mare to a standstill.

'That house beyond,' he said, 'the one with the slate roof on the hill, there's your home, girleen.'

With a sudden access of tenderness he looked down at her quizzically from under his black hat. This stranger girl with her American clothes and faintly American accent was his son's wife and would some day be the mother of his grandchildren. Her hands were gripping the front of the cart, and the tears poured down her cheeks. She made no effort to restrain herself or conceal them, nor did she turn her eyes from the sea. He remembered a far-away evening when he had returned like this, having seen off his son, and understood.

'Yes,' he said after a moment's silence. "'Tis so, 'tis so.'

A woman with a stern and handsome face stood in the doorway. As everything in Tom seemed to revolve about a fixed point of softness—his huge frame, his comfortable paunch, his stride, his warm, round face with the twinkling brown eyes and the grey moustache—so everything in her seemed to obey a central reserve. She might be passionate but never emotional: hers was a nature refined to the point of hardness, and while her husband took colour from everything about him, her circumstances or acquaintance would, you felt, have no effect on her.

One glance was sufficient to show her that he had already surrendered. She, her look seemed to say, would not give in so easily. But sooner than he she saw the signals of fatigue.

'You're tired, child,' she exclaimed.

'I am,' replied the girl, resting her forehead for a moment in her hands. In the kitchen she removed her hat and coat and sat at the head of the table where the westering light caught her. She was very dark, but the pallor of illness had bleached the dusk from her skin; her cheekbones were high so that they formed transparencies beneath her eyes. It was a very Irish face, long and spiritual, with an inherent melancholy that might dissolve into sudden anger or equally sudden gaiety.

'You were a long time sick,' said Maire Shea.

'I was.'

'Maybe 'twas too soon for you to travel?'

'If I didn't I'd have missed the summer at home.'

'So Michael said, so Michael said '

'Ah,' declared Tom, with burning optimism, 'you won't be long pulling round now, with God's help. There's great air here, powerful air.'

'You'll be finding us rough, simple poor people,' added his wife with dignity, taking from him a parcel that contained a glass sugar-bowl to replace the flowered mug without a handle that had served them till now. 'We're not used to your ways nor you to ours, but we have a great will to please you '

'We have,' agreed Tom heartily. 'We have indeed '

The young woman took no food, only sipped her tea that smelt of burned wood, and it was clear, as when she tried to pour milk from the large jug, that she was completely astray in her new surroundings. And that acute sense of her discomfort put a strain on the two old people, on Tom especially, whose desire to make a good impression was general and strong. They sat there, almost as uncomfortable as herself, ashamed for the inadequacy of their home.

After tea she went up to the room to rest. Maire came with her

'Tis Michael's room,' she said. 'And that's Michael's bed '

The bare, green-washed room with a low window looking on to the front of the house, an iron bed and an oleograph of the Holy Family made a strange frame for its guest. For a moment an old familiar feeling of wild jealousy stole over Maire Shea, but when the girl in undressing exposed the scar across her stomach she felt guilty.

'You'll sleep now,' she said.

'I ought to.'

Maire stole down the straight stair. Tom was standing in the doorway, his black hat over his eyes, his hands clasped behind his back.

'Well?' he asked in a whisper

'Whisht!' she replied 'She shouldn't be travelling at all. I don't know what come over Michael to let her, and he knowing well we have no facility. The cut in her stomach—'tis the length of your arm, God between us and misfortune! She'll want a lot of rest.'

'Would I go up and tell Kate not to come? Herself and Joan will be in soon.'

"Twould be no use. All the neighbours will be in."

'So they will, so they will,' he admitted in a depressed tone. Tom was particularly restless. After a while he went upstairs and came down again on tiptoe.

'She's asleep now. But whisper, Moll, she must have been crying.'

"Tis weakness."

'Maybe she'd be a bit lonely?'

"Tis weakness. She should never be travelling."

Later Kate and Joan arrived, and after them three or four other women. Twilight fell within the long whitewashed kitchen, and still they talked in subdued voices. Suddenly the door on the stairs opened and Michael's wife appeared. She seemed to have grown calmer, though she still retained something of the air of a sleep-walker, and in the half-light, with her jet-black eyes and hair, her long, pale face had a curious ethereal beauty.

All of them felt ill-at-ease with her. Tom fussed about her in a helpless fidgety way till the women began to mock him. Even then a question put at random caused him to fret.

'Can't ye leave her alone now, can't ye? Can't ye see she's tired? Go on with yeer talk, leave ye, and don't be bothering the girl.'

'No,' she said, smiling, 'I'm not so tired now.' Her voice retained a memory of her native Donegal in a certain dry sweetness, as when she pronounced 'now' as though it were 'ny'.

'Have a sup of this,' urged Tom. 'A wee sup—'twill do you no harm.'

She refused the whisky, but two of the other women took it, and Tom, having first toasted 'her lovely black eyes,' drank a whole glassful without pausing for breath. He gave a deep sigh and filled the glass again before sitting down beside the open door. The sky turned deep and deeper blue above the crown of a tree that looked in the low doorway and a star winked at the window-pane. Maire rose and lit the wall-lamp. From far away, in a lag between two headlands, a voice was calling and calling on a falling cadence 'Taaamie, Taaamie!' and in the distance the call had a remote and penetrating sweetness. When it ceased, there came to their ears the noise of the sea, and suddenly it was night. The young woman drew herself up in her low chair, and they could see plainly the shiver that passed down her whole body. One of the women sighed and the kitchen was silent. The girl looked up.

'I'm sorry,' she said quietly. 'I was only a child when I left Ireland and 'tis all strange to me now.'

'Tis surely,' replied Kate heartily. 'Tis lonely for you. You're every bit as strange here as we'd be in the heart of New York.'

'Just so, just so,' exclaimed Tom, with approval.

'Never mind!' cried Kate, laughing and slapping her knee. 'I'll take your part.'

'Deed and you will not,' replied her brother with mock indignation. 'Devil a one is going to look after that girl but meself.'

'A deal she have to expect from either of ye,' added Maire dryly. 'It wouldn't occur to ye that she should be in bed.'

She dipped a candle in the fire and held it above her head. The girl followed her up the stairs. The others sat on and talked; then all took their leave together. Maire, busy about the yard, for a long time heard voices and footsteps coming back to her on the light land wind. She was thinking of the stranger. She had thought of her often before, but now she found herself nonplussed. It wasn't only that the girl was a stranger and a sick one at that, but—and this Maire had

never allowed for—she was the child of a strange world, the atmosphere of which had come with her, bewildering Maire's critical sense. Less clearly than Kate or Tom, yet clearly enough for all that, she realised that the girl was as strange amongst them as they would be in New York. In the clear starlight a cluster of whitewashed cottages stood out against the hillside like a frame of snow about its orange window-squares. For the first time Maire looked at it and, with a strange feeling of alienation, wondered what it was like to one unused to it.

A voice upstairs startled her. She turned in to see that Tom had disappeared. Heated a little with drink and emotion, he had tiptoed up the stairs and opened the girl's door. He was surprised to find her sitting on the low window-edge in her dressing-gown. From the darkness she was looking out with strange eyes on the same scene Maire had been watching with eyes grown too familiar, wondering perhaps what it seemed like to her.

'Are 'oo awake?' he asked—a foolish question.

'Wisha, for goodness' sake will you come down and leave the girl sleep?' came Maire's voice in irritation from the foot of the stairs.

'No, no, no,' he whispered nervously.

'What is it?' asked the girl.

'Are 'oo all right?'

'Quite, thanks.'

'We didn't disturb you?'

'Not at all.'

'Come down out of that, you old fool!' cried Maire in an exasperated tone.

'I'm coming, I'm coming—Jasus, can't you give us a chance?' he added angrily. 'Tell me,' this in a whisper, 'the operation, 'twon't come against you?'

He bent over her, hot and excited, his breath smelling of whisky.

'I don't understand you.'

'Ah,' he said in the same low tone, 'wouldn't it be a

terrible misfortune? A terrible misfortune! 'Tis great life in a house, a child is '

'Oh, no,' she answered hastily 'It won't affect me like that '

'Are 'oo sure? What did the doctors say?'

'That it won't '

'Ah, glory be to the hand of God!' he said, turning away, 'tis a great ease to my mind to know that A great ease, a great ease.'

He stumbled downstairs to face his wife's anger that continued long after he had shut up the house for the night and retired to bed Maire Shea had a bitter tongue when she chose to use it She chose now For weeks they had been keying themselves up for this day, to make a good impression on Michael's wife, and now it was spoiled, irretrievably spoiled, by a drunken fool of a man

He, poor simple soul, turned and tossed, unable to sleep at the thought of the injustice of it As though a man wouldn't want to know a thing like that, as though he mightn't ask his own daughter-in-law a civil question, without being told that he was worse than a black, a heathen savage from Africa, without niceness or consideration except for his own dirty gut!

He who tried to leave a good impression on the mind of every hog, dog and devil that came the road!

## II

In the morning Michael's wife was somewhat better The sun appeared only at intervals, but for the greater part of the day she was able to sit by the gable where she had a view of the sea in shelter from the fresh wind Occasionally Maire came and sat on a stool beside her. Maire asked no questions—her pride again—the girl still seemed to be too tired to understand or even be aware of the old woman's curiosity, and at first the conversation was strained, almost hostile. Then something seemed to tell the girl what it was that



ailed Maire; curiosity for the minute trifles of their life in America, hers and Michael's; the details that had become so much part of her that she found it difficult to remember them. How much the maid was paid, how the milk was delivered, the apartment house with its central heating, the negro lift-hop, the street cars and the rest of it. Her mind seemed to embrace the old woman's vivid and unlettered mind, trying to construct a picture of the world in which her son lived.

At dinner-time Tom came in from the fields in a dirty old shirt and pants, his black hat shading his eyes.

'Listen, Annie,' he said in a gruff frank tone, very different from that of the previous night, and he leaned against the wall beside her, his hands behind his back. 'I have a word to say to you. Tell Michael he should write oftener to his mother. Women are like that. If 'twas your own son now, you'd understand.'

'I know, I know,' she said hastily.

'Of course you do. You're a fine, big-hearted girl, and don't think we're not grateful to you. The wife now, she's a decent woman, but she have queer ways. She wouldn't thank God Almighty to His face, and she'll never say it to you, but she said it to others, how good you were to us.'

'Don't blame Michael,' replied Annie in a low voice. 'It isn't his fault.'

'I know sure, I know.'

'He never has time.'

'Mention it to him though, you!' Mention it to him. The letter to say you were coming, 'twas the first we had from himself for months. Tell him 'tis his mother, not me at all.'

'If you only knew how he wanted to come!'

'Yes, yes, but 'twill be two years more before he can. Two years to one at his hour of life, 'tis only like to-morrow, but for old people that never know the time or the place. . . . And that itself, it may be the last he'll see of one or the other of us. And we've no one but him, Annie, more's the pity.'

In a few days she had regained something of her strength. Tom cut her a stout ashplant, and she went for short walks, up to the post-office or down to the little harbour. Mostly she went alone. To Tom's delight the weather turned showery, but it never completely broke, and after the first few days of it, she no longer let it keep her within the house. All day long the horizon was peopled by a million copper-coloured cloudlets, tiny, rounded, packed back to the very limits of the sky like cherubs in a picture of the Madonna. Then they began to swell, like bubbles filling with air: one broke away from the mass, and then another, it grew into a race; they gathered, sending out dark streamers that blackened the day and broke the patina of the water with dark-green stormy paths; lastly, a shrill whistle of wind and wild driving rain enveloped everything in mist. She took shelter under a fence or at the lee-side of a rock, and watched the shower dissolve in golden points of light that grew into a sunlit landscape beyond, as the clouds, like children in frolic terror, scampered back to the horizon, the blue strip of sky they left broadening, the rain thinning, the fields and sea stripping off their scum of shadow until everything about her was sparkling and steaming again.

What it meant to the girl from America they could only guess from her looks when she returned after such a downpour. Whenever she remained too long in the kitchen the shadow came on her once more, her mouth twitched and the tears rolled down her cheeks. Kate, who had seen many such cases in hospital, bade them take no notice.

She seemed to be very much drawn towards Kate and her sister and Tom noticed this with approval. Her walks often took her to the post-office, and there she sat for hours with the two sisters, often sharing their meals, and listening to Kate's tales of old times in the parish, about her father and mother, about Tom, but most frequently about Michael's youth.

Kate was a rare type, tall and bony, with a long face, long nose, long, protruding chin and wire spectacles. Her teeth,

like those of her sister, had all rotted in sheer neglect. She was the sort country people describe as having a great heart. Fearless courage, intelligence and kindness go to make up the definition, Kate had all three. She was always busy, always chattering, always in good humour. Her brother, who was very proud of her, told Annie how she had gone off for an operation that was not expected to succeed, carrying a basket of eggs to sell so that she would not have her journey for nothing. Then she discovered that she had missed the bus, and walked twelve miles into Bandon rather than come back or trouble anyone for a lift. Her sister, on the other hand, was a nun-like creature. She had been in an asylum but was improving slowly. She had a wonderfully soft, round, gentle face, still with traces on it of a girlish complexion, a voice that seldom rose above a whisper, and the most lovely eyes; but when the cloud came on her she was perverse and obstinate. Joan was nominally the post-mistress, but it was Kate who did all the work.

As much as Michael's wife took to them they took to her. Joan would have wept her eyes out for a homeless dog, but Kate's sympathy was marked by a certain shrewdness, blended with stoicism. Occasionally she said things that showed a surprising understanding.

'You hadn't much luck in your marriage,' she said one day.

'How?' The young woman looked at her blankly.

'Though you're only married a year you had more than your share of trouble. No honeymoon, and then the sickness and now the separation. Nothing but separations.'

'Yes,' said Annie, her lips trembling. 'Nothing but separations. We had seven months together—only seven months.'

'Ah, God help you, I never saw a lonelier creature than you were the night you came. But don't take it to heart. 'Tis how we grow.'

'Is it, I wonder?'

''Tis, 'tis'

'That's what Father Coveney says,' wailed Joan, 'but I could never understand it meself. All the good people having all the troubles that don't deserve it, and the bad people getting off'

'You'll be happier for it in the latter end, and you've a good boy in Michael,' said Kate 'Wisha, there I am again! Michael, Michael! 'Tis nothing but Michael with me.'

'And why wouldn't you?'

'Because you must be sick of hearing me talking about him'

'No, I'm not, I'm not And you're like Michael yourself'

'I am, is it?' exclaimed Kate, with delight.

'You are. He takes after you more than anyone else, I think.'

'Ah, now, I always said it! Didn't I, Joan? And why wouldn't he? Why wouldn't he? When his mother beat him 'twas up to me he came for comfort'

'He often said it—you made a man of him'

'I did that,' said Kate proudly. 'I did so. Musha, he was a wild boy, and there was no one to understand him when he was wild'

She was off again into reminiscences, but while she talked she did not cease to observe the girl sitting in the chimney corner. The girl's melancholy puzzled her, not so much for its own sake—wasn't it natural enough?—but because of a certain thing in her that suggested anything but softness At the same time she had to admit that the melancholy did not come so often to the surface, as though returning health were bringing with it peace of mind.

'You're getting to like us, I think?' she said

'I am,' admitted the girl 'When I came first I was afraid.'

'You won't be so glad to get back to the States.'

'I wish I never saw the States again,' said the girl bitterly.

'Oh, my!'

'It's true'

'Ah, well! Two years more and ye'll be back together.'

Then ye'll have the fine time. And what's a couple of years to a girl of your age?'

'More than you think '

'True, true, years are only as you feel them.'

'And I feel I'll never come back to this place again.'

'Ach, you're giving in to it again! And now, listen to me! 'Tis a thing I often said to Tom Shea Why wouldn't ye come back? Why wouldn't ye, I say? Never mind your fool of a father-in-law telling you Michael wouldn't get a job. Why wouldn't he get a job as well as the rest of them? And only his father was a soft old fool he'd never have let the boy go away '

To Tom's disgust the weather cleared without a downpour, though there was little sun. Now, early and late Michael's wife was out, sitting on the rocks or striding off to the harbour or the village. She became a familiar figure along the roads in her blue dress with her ashplant. At first she stood a long way off, watching the men at the nets or sitting at the cross-road, as time went on she came closer, and one day a fisherman came up and spoke to her

'You're Michael Shea's wife?'

'Yes.'

'I was at school with him. Maybe you'd like a little row in a boat some time '

After that she went everywhere, into their houses, on to the quay and out in the boats when they were fishing. It was curious company for a girl, but all of them had known Michael as a boy, all had stories of him and his knowledge of boats and fishing, and after a day or two it was as though she had grown up in that place. Perhaps too she gathered something from those hours on the water, in little silent coves on grey days when the wind shook out a shoal of lights, or in the bay when the thunderous light moved swiftly, starting hares of brightness from every hollow, blue from the hills, violet from the rocks, primrose from the fields, and here and there a mysterious milky glow that might be rock or field or tree. Perhaps it deepened her

knowledge, so that she no longer felt a stranger when she walked along the strand, listening to the tide expand the great nets of weed with a crisp, gentle, pervasive sound like the sound of rain, or from her window saw the moon plunge its great silver drill into the water.

At any rate there was an astonishing change in her appearance as in her manner. She had filled out, her face had tanned, and the gloomy, distraught air had left it. Tom was proud of the change in her.

'There,' he said proudly, 'didn't I say we'd make a new woman of her? Would anyone know her for the girl she was the night she came? Would they? My God, the time she opened the door and walked down the stairs I thought her own were calling her.'

Kate and Joan too were pleased. They liked her for her own sake and Michael's sake, but they had come to love her for the sake of her youth and freshness. Only Maire held her peace. Nothing had ever quite bridged the gap between the two women. And in every glance, in every word of Maire's there was an implicit question. But it was some time before she succeeded in infecting her husband with the disease. Then one day he came to Kate, looking troubled.

'Kate,' he said, 'tis about Michael's wife.'

'Och aye! What about her? 'Tisn't complaining you are?'

'No, but tell me now what you think of her.'

'What I think?'

'Tis Maire.'

'Well?'

'She's uneasy.'

'About what, eria?'

'She thinks the girl have something on her mind.'

'Tom Shea, I tell you now as I told you before, your wife is a suspicious woman.'

'Wisha, wisha, can't you leave what's done done? We know ye never agreed. But now, Kate, you can't deny she's a clever woman.'

'And what does the clever woman think?'

'She thinks Annie had a row with Michael, that's what she thinks now, plain and straight, and I won't put a tooth in it.'

'I doubt it'

'Well, now, it might be some little thing a few words would put right.'

'And I'm to say the few words?'

'Well, now, Kate, 'twas my suggestion, my suggestion entirely. The way 'tis with Maure, she might say too much or say too little'

'She would,' agreed Kate grimly

Next day she reported to him that the idea was absurd. He had to be content with that, for Kate too was a clever woman. But his wife's observations never ceased till they became a drag on his patience. He was a simple man who wished to indulge his affections as he pleased. Three weeks had passed and he found it almost intolerable. As usual he came to Kate

'The worst of it is,' he said, 'she's making me as bad as herself. 'Tisn't that she says anything, but here I am all bothered so that I can hardly talk to the girl. I can't sleep with it . . . And last night—'

'What happened last night?'

'I heard her talking in her sleep.'

'Michael's wife?'

'Yes'

'And what harm if she do itself?'

'No harm at all,' shouted Tom in a rage, stamping up and down the kitchen. 'No harm in the world, but, Christ, woman, I tell you it upset me!'

'Here she is now,' said Kate. 'Here's the girl ye have all the connaisseuring about. Look at her, will you!'

'Maure,' said Tom that night as they were going to bed, 'you're dreaming'

'How?'

'About Annie'

'Maybe I am,' she admitted grudgingly.

'You are.'

'I had my reasons. But this while past she's different. Likely Kate said something to her.'

'She did.'

'That explains it so,' said Maire complacently.

Two nights later he was wakened suddenly. He heard Michael's wife speaking in her sleep. She spoke in a low tone with long intervals of silence. The voice went on and on, very low, sometimes expressing, or so it seemed, a great joy, sometimes as it were pleading. But the impression it left most upon him was one of intimacy and tenderness. Next morning she came down late, her eyes red. It was an hour or more before she came to herself. And that afternoon a letter came from her aunt in Donegal. When she had read it she announced that she must leave on the following day.

'You'll be glad to go,' said Maire.

'I'll be sorry,' replied the girl simply.

'If a letter comes from Michael?'

'It won't come here. I didn't expect to be here so long.'

Maire gave her a long, questioning look. For the first time the girl gave it back, and for a moment they looked into one another's eyes, mother and wife.

'At first,' said Maire, turning her gaze on the fire, 'I didn't trust you. I'm a straight woman, and I'll tell you that. I didn't trust you.'

'And now?'

'Right or wrong, I think my son chose well for himself.'

'I hope you'll always think it,' replied the girl in the same tone.

But now the positions of Tom and his wife were reversed. It was he who was upset. Before dusk rain began to fall in torrents. He went out late to Kate and sat between his two sisters, arguing.

'There's a woman all out,' he said bitterly. 'She upsets



me, and then sits down on my troubles. What's on the girl's mind for her to go talking in her sleep? There's something queer about her, something I can't make out. I've a good mind to send word to Michael.'

'What would you say?' asked Kate. 'Disturbing him without cause! Can't you be sensible?'

'I can't,' he replied crossly. 'She's here in my charge, and if anything happened her—'

'Nothing will.'

'But if it did?'

'She's all right. She got back her health that none of us thought she would. Besides, she's going from you.'

'That's what's worrying me,' he confessed.

He returned late through the driving rain. The women had gone to bed. He turned in, but somehow he could not sleep. The wind had risen from the sea and rattled the window-panes. All at once he caught it again, the damned talking. He lay quiet in order not to wake Maire. Long intervals of silence and then the voice again. And then suddenly, in three anguished mounting breaths, 'Michael! Michael! Michael!'

He felt a cold hand touching his forehead and his heart. For a moment it was as though Michael had really entered the room above his head, across all those hundreds of miles of water and storm and darkness, as though all the inexpressible longing of his young wife had incarnated him beside her. He made the sign of the cross as if against some devilish power. And after that there was silence but for the sound of the rising storm.

Next morning he would have avoided her eyes if anyone could have done so. But there was something about her that made him look in spite of himself. A nervous exaltation had crystallised in her, making her seem ethereal, remote and lovely. Because of the rain that still continued to pour, Maire would have had her stay, but she insisted.

She went out in heavy boots and raincoat to say good-bye to Kate and Joan. Joan wept. 'Two years,' said Kate in

her hearty way, 'twill be no time passing.' When she left it was as if a light had gone out in the lonely childless house.

Maire's good-bye was soberer but generous too.

'I know Michael is in good hands,' she said.

'Yes,' said the girl, with a radiant smile. 'He is.'

And they drove off through the rain. The sea on which she looked back was blinded by it, all but a leaden strip beside the rocks. She crouched over her trunk with averted head. Tom, an old potato-bag across his shoulders, drove into it, head down. The fear had not left him. He looked down at her once or twice, but her face was hidden in the collar of her coat. They left the seemingly endless, wind-swept upland road and plunged down among the trees that creaked and roared above their heads, spilling great handfuls of water into the cart. His fear became a terror. When he stood before the carriage door he looked at her appealingly. He could not frame the question that he looked; it was a folly he felt must pass from him unspoken; so he asked it only with his eyes, and with her eyes she answered him; a look of ecstatic fulfilment.

The whistle went. She leaned out of the carriage window as the train lurched forward, but he was no longer looking. He raised his hands to his eyes and swayed to and fro. For a long time he remained like that, a ridiculous figure with the old potato-bag and the little pool of water that gradually gathered on the platform about his feet.

## *Smoking Concert*

BY L. A. PAVEY

(From *Life and Letters*)

THE not too large room they hired once a year from The Crown and Feathers was so full that only waiters long practised in their particular kind of juggling could have served the drinks that were called for in endless rotation—or at any rate served them without disaster. And after not more than a quarter of the evening had been spent the atmosphere was so thick that they had also to be possessed of a special sort of sight. It was as though they carried on, with the odds heavily against them, a sort of Dogger Bank engagement through the fog.

They were gathered in self-chosen groups at little tables, these men from a large City office; but already, within half an hour of the opening chorus, they had become a company quite different from the collection of casual individuals that had filed in at the beginning. They were knit now by close ties and sentiments, and they had a solid front to show the world. Each one even felt obscurely that the daily routine in the office must be something different, more significant, than it had hitherto appeared, if these other by no means negligible people were concerned in it. They gradually became slightly proud of themselves. They slung out their legs a bit farther from under the tables and leaned back, hands in pockets.

Prescott was glad he was with Dicks and Lawley, men whom he liked although he met them seldom. Their business orbits did not often happen to intersect. He also surveyed the rest of the gathering with a growing interest, feeling quite pleased that he was for once on a level with his juniors and that he need not bother about the status of his seniors. He ordered three more pints of beer with crisp incisiveness, firmly putting down Lawley's attempt to take the lead from

him As he drank, first ceremoniously holding out his tankard towards Dicks', then towards Lawley's, it seemed to him very right, and not in the least a small thing, that out of the corner of his eye he could see pots raised or half-raised to happy faces, or people sitting contentedly talking to their fellows A feeling of warmth towards all these folk, bound to him by the undeniable tie that they lived through the same working day, engaged on the same business, pervaded him He wished they could see it in his face and bearing—he looked round, and catching the eyes of a couple of colleagues rather better known to him than the rest, raised his tankard to them and smiled happily His lips formed the word 'Cheerio!' and he heard it himself, but it did not carry beyond his own table.

There was a hammering on his left.

'Gentlemen,' roared the chairman, 'silence, please. Mr. Tom Peters will sing "The Sergeant-Major," by request.'

Thoroughly at ease, in delightful warmth, he heard the song in snatches, sometimes allowing his attention to wander and sometimes joining in the chorus He thought of his old Army days and they appeared desirable. As he now saw it, he might have been a slave, but his slavery had been enveloped in a larger freedom He would have liked to convey this idea in its entirety to Dicks, whom he felt was a man of understanding, after his own kidney. But he realized that, at that time, and in those circumstances, it was impossible. Instead, Dicks said to him emphatically, and laying stress on his own stark individuality in opposing the sentiment of the applauding gathering, 'I say—b—r the sergeant-major!'

This seemed to Prescott at least as true as anything he might have said to Dicks, and he laughed heartily with him 'I am a man of large tolerance,' he thought to himself, 'and able to appreciate everybody's opinion Dicks must realize that!'

Being that sort of man, he considered that a place in this world of easy good fellowship, where people drank together and sang to one another, was his by right. The fact that he

had not been to such a gathering for many months presented itself to him somewhat uneasily, but he put it aside. 'Mustn't overdo things,' he told himself sagely. He remembered Office Smoking Concerts of earlier years, before that one or two evenings among bachelor friends, and before that again cafés in France where life had run full to overflowing. . . .

The hammer went again 'Silence for the Chair'

'Omnes,' shouted the chairman, 'Number fourteen, "Pack up your troubles," and when we say that, gentlemen, we *mean* "Pack them!" Sing as if there's no office and not a care in the world!'

'That's the stuff,' thought Prescott enthusiastically. He sang until his voice cracked, and he looked sharply at Lawley, to see if he'd noticed. But Lawley was singing himself, intently, in a queer sort of bass.

Directly the song was over and the singers were cheering themselves he leaned across to Lawley and said, 'Sang that a few times, eh? D'you remember Montauban? Well—'

'Yes,' said Lawley, with emphasis, then fumbled in his mind for the expression of what seemed to be an acute emotion. But all he could add was, 'Long time ago now.'

Prescott did not like to feel that the time was quite so long. 'Getting on,' he admitted. 'Judicial,' he thought, 'I am, judicial.'

'Oh, it's a hell of a time, really,' said Lawley carelessly, with an air as though he might just as easily or appropriately have said something else.

Prescott was a trifle startled, but seeing at once that Prescott really didn't give a damn he grinned easily. 'Finely tolerant,' he told himself, 'that's what I am. Finely tolerant'

'Miss Vivie Bennett,' announced the chairman.

Miss Bennett was a bold baggage, attired in a nurse's uniform that was tremendously exaggerated, except as to the skirts, and these were brief.

'Let me tell you, boys,' she announced in a voice of brass and with an unmatched compound of effrontery and

enticement, 'that once when I was in the Maternity Ward—as a nurse—'

Roars of laughter

'I wish you'd let me go straight on *You* wouldn't have been to blame if I'd been a patient!'

Roars of laughter.

'I was being courted by a spry young thing of sixty-odd He wanted to be a patient of mine—as he wasn't good for anything else Not knowing, of course, just what *did* happen in my ward "Well," I said, "you *would* have to be ill, very ill indeed, if—"'

Roars of laughter.

Dicks ordered pints once more and Prescott drank at once. He was pleased with the way he did that. 'Show them I can carry on without a tremor,' he thought.

Miss Bennett had changed her nurse's uniform for the tight habit of a street dancer dress and was kicking out with carefully calculated abandon. Prescott had no illusions about her performance, but it seemed right enough, because it made a piece with the evening 'Tolerance, that's it, always tolerance!' Nevertheless he happened to look up just as she had passed through the swing doors after her performance, and her face shocked him. It looked cross and tired, almost disgusted, and really coarse, instead of showing merely a broad *bonhomie*.

Immediately he was singing 'Cockles and mussels, Alive, Alive-o,' which had started before he was aware of it The fate of Sweet Kitty Malone affected him, brought tears to his eyes. He would, he told himself, have been a kindly patron of hers had he, too, trod the streets of Dublin's fair city. He dwelt profoundly on the notion that a hundred men were singing about a dead girl Yet there was not a girl in the room to acknowledge their emotion for what it was. That was it, a great truth, they made men desirous by their withdrawal They knew profoundly what it meant to be sung about, while their modesty or diffidence kept

them apart in their own world. Men knew there were thousands of them and that they could not get at them. How right women were! *Savoir vivre*, that was it! Perfect comprehension! He went on marvelling at all that was implied by sex, and watched the girls who came on the stage with a peculiarly close attention. Each one appeared so modestly, securely protected of course by the presence of such a number of men, yet ready and able to assert and exploit all the differences of sex without giving away an inch of ground unnecessarily. He doubted whether anyone in that audience saw this so clearly, felt it so deeply, as himself. Even when they had left the stage, and men with a rattling humour or sentimental tenors took their place, there flashed through his mind like a revolving light the knowledge of that world apart peopled by the wives and sisters and girls of the men in that room. Sublimely indifferent to the aspirations and the antics of their menfolk, they could afford to let them out on leash, that was it. They would resume their domination in due course. How they understood! 'Perfect comprehension,' he repeated to himself.

He knew all this, indubitably. But all that he could do about it was to buy another round for Dicks, Lawley and himself. This was masculinity, the other pole of life, and no woman would dare oppose his will by word, look or deed. He ordered the round, but finding that he would have been incommoded by more drink at the moment, he got up and went out of the swing-doors. To get to the place where he might relieve himself he had to pass through a billiard room. He was taken back a little by the faces of the men there; but that evening he did not despair of anybody, and he looked upon them cheerfully. The man in the next white-glazed compartment, whom he did not know from Adam, told him a story about a lady and a house-painter, and he caught himself laughing at this all the way back to his seat.

It was immediately after telling this story to Dicks and Lawley, who appreciated it like the good fellows they were,

and half-way through 'There is a Tavern in the Town,' that it was borne in upon him overwhelmingly just what a thing was this future that was stretching out in front of him. He saw it as a solitary fight. There would be no taverns in the town for him. But he would struggle on with such tenacity that his friends, even though they would say nothing, would be lost in admiration. Sadly, nobly, he would go on. He thought with tears in his eyes of a sailor ploughing a lonely furrow. And at the same time he was quite well aware that this different world, that rendered so extraordinary his daily task of sitting at a desk and writing, came about through slightly heightened perceptions, an altered focus. He viewed himself slightly sardonically.

Nevertheless it was, in effect, true that his future was a noble one. With children to educate, he would have continually to wear the hair-shirt of poverty. He watched with a slight melancholy Dicks ordering another round. He himself had been spending money in that same extraordinary fashion while his family still looked to him for bread. 'And a little butter,' he told himself. 'Corsets, hats, shirts, shoes, kleen-esi, chair-covers, house repairs. And they love green-gage jam. God, have I pulled them through?' He began to feel a little anxious, though still benevolently inclined to believe there was something fine in him as a protector. The pathetic notion that even the cat in his basket by the fire trusted him for his well-being wrenched at him suddenly in an intolerable way.

He was beginning, quite inexplicably, he felt, to lose his grip a little, both of the proceedings and of that hitherto acutely realized philosophic position of his, when he suddenly found himself linking hands with the rest and singing 'Auld Lang Syne.' It wasn't fair, when you weren't feeling emotionally strong, he thought pathetically. It was hitting below the belt. He wanted to tell one or two friendly groups about that, but he was caught in a surge towards the cloak-room. He lost sight of Lawley and Dicks. . . .



He turned with aversion from a street girl who accosted him outside and then from a beggar. He felt that he could not possibly endure any more human contacts. He even mumbled to himself, 'Too many people in this world' . . . 'Of ours,' he added, in order to make the thing exact and correct.

At his terminus he ran into Strong and Hepburn, and in a cosy carriage he had to shatter a deliciously dreamy state of mind in order to listen to some good ones they insisted on telling. He even found himself telling one or two himself. 'All right, I suppose,' he yawned to himself, 'they're laughing, anyway.' But the thought grew with that familiar journey home, and he did not resist it and felt no compunction finally in accepting it, that he was doomed to mediocrity like the rest of men. He had an individually different wife, and children of his own creation, and that was all. And in spite of that, and of a bewildering evening, when he came to look at it, he felt good and decent when he stepped out of the train at his home station, saying, 'Cheerio!' to Strong and Hepburn, who were going on farther. There came to his mind the saying of a member of his old battalion when all his friends were accepting commissions and he was asked why he did not. 'Well, I thought we wanted one good steady private,' he had said. 'That's me,' he said, 'a good steady private.' 'Good night,' he called to the ticket-collector.

## *'Tune on an Harmonica'*

BY MICHAEL SAYERS

(From *The New English Weekly*)

### I

SHE leaned across the half-door, her dark hair down, and her untidy blouse fallen from her breast.

'What?' she said.

The pedlar was a young, fair Russian Jew, not past seventeen, with soft skin and open, timid, blue eyes. He carried a pack of pictures in frames slung from his shoulder by a strong cord.

'Pictures!' he said. 'Will you buy?'

A harsh female voice spoke from the interior of the squat, white-washed cottage: 'What's going on?'

'Let's have a look,' said the young woman, pushing her hair from her eyes.

'Pictures!' said the pedlar. 'Beautiful!'

'Well, give us a look,' she repeated, 'anyhow.'

It was getting on for evening. A little wind set up, and the clustered trees rustled. A cow mooed in a field beyond the lane. The pigs in the yard outside the cottage were restless. And the sly cut of the new moon was like a silver cap set on the head of spring folly.

The foreign pedlar twisted himself free of his pack. He sighed and passed his hand across his square forehead. Standing there in the darkening yard, a stocky bowed figure, young-old, he appealed to something motherly in the watching woman. She lifted her blouse to cover her breast, and pushed open the half-door.

'Show us,' she said.

The pedlar untied his pack and held up a framed photograph. A maiden with a coronal was depicted, and she seemed mad, for there were rags of blossoms stuck in her hair and bosom, and her mien was distracted. Underneath this picture was the legend 'Ophelia.'

The pedlar held this up for the woman to see.

A cow moored loudly, and the chill breeze made the trees rustle like crinkled paper.

'Will you buy?' said the pedlar. 'Very cheap!'

'Let's see another,' said the woman.

'How?' said the pedlar.

The woman, holding her soft black hair, bent loosely down and took a picture from the pile on the ground. She was broad-shouldered and broad-hipped. Her features were full and handsome. She was supple and strong.

'You like it?' said the pedlar. 'You buy?'

'I like this one,' she said, holding it for him to see. It was the picture of two Venetian lovers in a gondola at Carnival time.

'Wait a tick,' she said, and ran inside to show it to her mother-in-law, who crouched by the low fire of turf.

'And what are you showing me pictures for,' said the old woman, drawing her shawl around her shoulders, 'and I as blind as the singing canary in the cage?'

But she was not blind, only half crazy.

The pedlar had gathered up his pack, and stood in the threshold. The two women turned to stare at him. He made a motion of drinking with his free hand.

'It's a drink he's wantin',' said the young woman.

'Would you like a sup of fresh buttermilk now?' she asked him.

The pedlar smiled and nodded his head many times.

'Milk! Yes!' he said. 'Yes!'

'Is it a Jewman he is or what?' said the old woman peevishly. 'Ask him where he's from!'

'What country have you?' said the young woman, handing him a mug of buttermilk.

He took the mug and smiled and nodded his head and drank some of the buttermilk, but then he spat it out, surprised.

'He's not a Jewman, for that he spits,' said the old woman.

'Don't you like it? It's fresh this hour,' said the young woman regarding him anxiously.

He gave her the mug and held out his hand for the picture 'Four shilling and six,' he said. 'Are you buy?'

'I'll buy,' she said 'Only it's himself keeps a tight hold on the cash, do you know But you may look in to-morrow again, please God, and we'll make a bargain To-morrow! To-morrow,' she said.

The pedlar understood at last, and taking the picture he re-strung his pack.

'Good, good,' he said 'Beautiful picture! Very cheap! To-morrow!'

She stood in the doorway watching his bowed small figure trudging away. And the moon glistened now as the evening deepened, and the trees made a noise like the sea.

## II

She came out to him at the half-door, wiping her hands on her skirt, and pushing her dark hair from her eyes It was a fresh, windy day. The chickens darted about in the yard, pecking furiously, and a comfortable hen waddled among them The pedlar was waiting patiently There was high colour in his cheek from the keen, clean wind, and his fair short hair was blown awry. He had on a black overcoat buttoned with one green button His brown shoes were cracked and dusty. He seemed tired. His pack was lying against the white-washed wall

'Good day,' he said, and lifted up his pack.

She examined him insolently, without speaking, her hand on her hip The half-door swung in the wind and banged 'Come in,' she said curtly.

He followed her into the cottage, carrying his pack This time the mother-in-law was not there They were alone. The pedlar began to loose his pictures.

'Tell us,' said the young woman, 'where do you come from?' And she made him understand.

'My land?' he said 'Russialand Far'

'Russia,' she said 'I've heard tell of the Russian Czar, and he a grand king on a throne'

'Czar! Yes! Czar,' he said, nodding his head. 'Yes! Look,' he said, taking her chosen picture and holding it against the wall near the hearth 'Beautiful picture! Yes?'

'There's no one about,' she said 'Would you wait while I wet a pot of tea?'

He sat quietly drinking the tea, and she sat opposite with her elbows on the bare table, staring at him

'It does be lonesome here,' she said. 'Himself doesn't come home many nights I'm thinking he'll not be in this night, and he to drink what the calf fetched on Thursday. The old one's gone too, thanks be! She's mad in the head for that her man's land was grabbed. Pity you haven't the language,' she said 'It's fine talk we could be making, the two of us, and we alone the lvelong day.'

'Thank you,' said the pedlar. He had finished his tea 'Four shilling and six, please. Thank you, please.'

'No thanks,' she said. 'Do you have to make off? Don't you like me at all?' she said

'How?' The pedlar did not understand. She put her arm on the table.

'Feel the smooth of my skin,' she said. 'It's the grand children I'd have this day, if himself was half a man What-ever the old one may say, it's not me's to blame if the house is desolate.'

'Four shilling and six, please You buy?'

She smiled at him, awkwardly, showing her healthy, uneven teeth.

'What's your hurry?' she said. 'You'll have your four and six, never you fear Though it's a clout I got last night for that I asked. I nicked it out of his pocket when he lay snoring, so I did. He's too old for me, and that's the truth.' She laughed, and though the pedlar had not followed a word he grinned and looked pleased.

'Nice day,' he said, waving his hand.

'You'll be wanting your money,' she said.

'Money, money,' he said 'Yes'

They were both grinning, standing up and facing each other, very close.

'The cut of your coat!' she said, and took hold of his ragged sleeve, and laughed. And the pedlar laughed too.

'Yes,' he said. 'Yes'

'You're a queer one,' she said, smiling at him shyly, 'sure enough!'

He gave an abrupt movement and dropped the pack. They both laughed.

She lifted her arms as though to tidy her hair, and then yawned and put her hands over her mouth, giggling

The pedlar stooped and fiddled with his pack. She knelt down and took his stubby hands in her red, swollen hands, and her dark hair hid her face.

'It's young and handsome you are,' she said slowly, 'and you a foreigner from a far land. God help me this day!'

'How? Don't like?' said the pedlar. 'Choose picture you like, eh? All four shilling and six, please'

'God help me this day,' she repeated, turning her face to him.

'Four shilling, then?' he said 'Without the sixpence. Four shilling, eh?'

'Get out of my sight!' she said, with a sudden flare of anger, and pushed the pack into his arms.

She pushed him violently through the doorway and ran back and caught hold of the table, panting

The pedlar approached again holding his square pack before him like a shield.

'Three shilling,' he said 'Beautiful picture.'

'God's curse on you and your beautiful picture!' she cried. 'Here! Take your picture!'

And she flung the picture of the Venetian lovers at his feet. Holding his pack he bent down and picked it up. He looked at her timidly, bewildered, shaking his head.

‘Three shillings?’ he said. ‘Without the frame? Very cheap!’

She made no answer for an instant, but clenched the table tight. Her face was very pale and her broad shoulders very high. Then she grabbed a mug and flung it at the pedlar. It struck him on the forehead, and he staggered back, and gave a queer cry like a squeak. And he fled, hugging his picture under the one arm and his pack under the other.

She ran to the doorway and caught a sight of him running from the yard down the tree-lined lane, his coat-tails flapping in the wind, hugging his picture and his pack, and his fair head bent down like a runner in a race.

The trees struggled with the wind, and the blinding sunshine came in floods as the hurried clouds passed like lids from the sun. The earth seemed almost articulate with the spring.

And she stood in the doorway, holding her hair from her eyes, gazing long after the young foreign pedlar. And then she remembered she must feed the pigs.

## *Our Mother*

BY JAMES STERN

(From *New Stories*)

SOME half-way up the hill our house was, up above Dublin, with Killiney Bay and the open sea below. From the front windows we could see beyond the Bay to Bray Head, with the black hole of the tunnel running through the hill. The trains that crawled into it and came out the other side went on down the Wicklow coast, where it's all sand and trees, and where the mountains in the distance are always bluer nor the sea.

Our Mother used to say Wicklow was the finest county in the land.

We thought it lovely, too. On the stretch of green below our house there grew tall palms that at night seemed like great black feathers against the inky sky, and eucalyptus trees and flowering shrubs the like I've never seen again, so that when the sun shone people did say it looked like some foreign place, so mild it was, even in the winter months.

'Killiney'd only freeze some'un as cold as yer mother!' Father often said.

I hated Father when he talked that way. Though times Rachel used to giggle and side with him, thinking what he said was funny. But Father did hardly ever speak well of our Mother, and always behind her back. Not that he was able to say things to her face, because they very seldom met; for she didn't live in our house, but half a mile away in one of her own, where she painted her pictures, and where we'd go every day except Saturdays and Sundays. People said she was famous for her pictures, even then. But Father—he didn't care.

I remember one Saturday, Father Riordan came and drank tea (porter it was, really) with Father—he and Mr. Sullivan from the office were about the only visitors Father ever had—and he said: 'Did ye hear what they done, Mike?



'I did not,' said Father.

'They've gone an' hung yer Missis in th' English Academy!' 'Begob!' cried Father, 'I wish to God they had!'

And Father Riordan—he was a huge fat man with a face the colour of a turkey-cock's—he sat back and laughed till we thought he'd break the back of his chair, his great body shook it so. Then he stopped and looked at us, and at Father, who winked, and they didn't talk about our Mother any more.

But at other times Father would: in the dark evenings over supper, when he could not find much to speak about, Rachel or I would say, 'Mother's poppies are out, Father,' or 'There were a lot of people at Mother's to-day.'

And he'd look up and drink some more of his whisky. 'Are they?' he'd kind of snap. Or 'Were there indeed—men, I s'pose!'

'Mostly men,' we'd say, and we'd begin to tell him who they were.

But he'd cut us short. 'Ach!' he'd mutter, 'That crowd! Wouldn't I rather be seen a rottin' corpse nor a-walkin' the same path with onc o' them long-haired, dirthy-lookin' good-fernothin's! Englishmen among 'em, too! I know what yer Mother does be up to with them bounders, so I do—shame upon her faithless head!' And he'd spit between his legs, under the table. So we'd stop and not talk any more about our Mother.

But it was horrid the things he'd say of her, and she not there to answer back. Why shouldn't she be having her friends, I thought—and men among them, too, if so it was she wished? See, we didn't know the way it was, nor exactly how she came to go. Just that she did run from him was the sum of what we knew. I hardly remembered her being along with us at all, so long ago it seemed. And when I'd ask her, she'd always look the other way and say, 'There now, Pat—amn't I for ever telling you yer Father and I don't see alike, an' that we only quarrel livin' under onc and the same roof!'

'Won't you ever come back and be with us in our house, Mother?' I'd ask.

But she'd look awful unhappy then, stare at the picture she'd be on, then give it a dab. 'No, son, I cannot,' she'd say, 'one day ye'll see 'tis better for us all, the way we be. Go on, now, and play'

So I'd go off and find Rachel—she was younger nor me, with blue eyes and black hair—but it was no playing I'd do, for I'd be wondering why it was that Father said the nasty things about our Mother—she seemed so kind and nice, she didn't say the like of them things of him, and we liked her so, as did everyone we knew.

Only sometimes, in the mornings, Father seemed to think back a bit to the time when they were children together, and only then did he show at all he wished she were back with us again. After breakfast he'd stand at the living-room window and point out with his thick brown finger (He smoked two packets of Player's Navy Cut a day, and Rachel and I collected the cigarette cards that were views of Ireland)

'See there!' he'd say, 'Way over the top o' that gum tree, there—'twas on that road I first set eyes on yer Mother. Comin' back from the school I was, and she runnin' along loike a white buttherfloy with her wee skirt an' ahl afloyin' in the wind! Divil a day that was fer 'imself!'

Then he'd open the window at the bottom and spit into the geranium bed, or maybe farther should there be a breeze, even on to the gravel path that led down under the eucalyptus trees and palms, to the bathing beach and the sea below

Olive would come in then and clear the breakfast things. She'd looked after us ever since I could remember, a long, thin nose and fair stringy hair she had, and she cooked for us and did the rooms. Father never did seem to like her much, I thought. When she came in he'd begin to hum a tune—he was always humming tunes when Olive was about—then he'd go out and stare at the view or pull up weeds till the church clock struck eight, when Olive would come out with Father's cap and stick, and say 'Here y'are, Sor—back at half-six?'

And she'd look up at him, but he'd not look back, only grunt at her 'Aye,' he'd say, and off he'd trundle up the hill.

Every morning he walked up to the top of the hill to catch the Dublin tram, for it was at *Joyce & Sullivan's, Solicitors*, he worked—in Kildare Street, opposite the Club, that is—and he was bid be there by nine. And the moment Father'd gone we'd go back into the house for Olive to take us through the village, over the river, and up to our Mother's house. Hers was more of a cottage than a house, whitewashed and thatched, with a view down over the river and then the sea. We loved to go to our Mother's because often she had people there to lunch, or they'd drop in for what they called 'a word or two to while away the light o' day.' Mostly men they were, as Father said. Funny men, too—clever-like. (Not like Father at all, though I expect he was clever at soliciting because he was never really poor.) They'd be artists and poets and painters and people of that kind. There was Mr. Yorke who lived in Dublin and wrote the poetry. He'd often tell it us out loud, without a book, for he'd a whole mass of it in his head. Great long hair he had, a beard, and a huge black and flowing tie bursting out of his neck like a rook's nest on the branch of a winter tree. And he talked in a very loud voice and called our Mother Martha darlint. He'd a wild way with him, for he'd come leaping into the room with not so much as a knock. 'Whoops!' he'd shout, 'be all that's holy, Martha darlint, isn't it the grandest soight in Oireland to see the loikes of yerself a-seated with yer dotes!'

And our Mother—she was small and brown-looking—'with the strength of a lapin' terrier,' as one of her friends did say—she'd get up, smile at Mr. Yorke, and shake him by both his hands. 'Take off yer coat, Dan,' she'd say, 'an' tell us the talk in the town.'

So Mr. Yorke would sit on the sofa overlooking the sea, and mostly he'd not tell us the talk in the town, but instead turn to us. 'Rachel—Pat,' he'd say, 'come over now till I tell ye a story. Did ye ever hear tell of the fellah that had an unholy packut o' money, from Ameriky he came . . .' or 'There was a lad once the name o' George Windsor, with a beard on 'im the loike o' me own, a crown o' gold on his

head, an' his home a mighty great castle named afther himself . . .'

And from such starts he'd make up his story as he went along, till our Mother would get a fit of the giggles and laugh till she'd have to hold her sides, they'd ache from the laughing so. After a time—with a smile, so that you couldn't help but love him—he'd suddenly end his story for no reason at all, and say 'Did ye ever hear the loike o' that now, fer a rare an' a rummy kind of a man?' And of course we'd have to say we never had, for if we didn't he'd lay his great hands on our heads and say again 'Tell me now, did ye ever hear the loike o' that?' Then off he'd go again till someone else came in.

It might be Rory O'Callaghan and Molly Magee—she lived along with him without his name—and Mike their son who'd play the games with us. Rory and Molly were painters the same as our Mother, but not so famous as she. They lived nearby in Kingstown, in an apartment place looking over the Pier, with Hove and the island of Lambay away at sea beyond. Or it might be Joe Byrne—'poorer than a painter' as our Mother said—though it was the books he wrote, and stories in the magazines, and plays, too, acted at The Abbey. But with all that, he'd always wear the same old shirt and trousers, dirty as them of the cattle-drivers on Killiney's market day.

Oh, and there'd be a whole lot more, coming and going and making themselves at home as the saying is. And before lunch we'd all go up to the room our Mother called her studio, a great big room it was, full of bottles and brushes and pieces of wood and canvases, messy as a sty at feeding time. But it was as light as the day, for it was a glass roof it had, and windows on three of its sides.

In there our Mother would show them all her pictures, and the others would say things, but Rachel and I and maybe Mike O'Callaghan if he was there—we'd not listen to what they were saying, for it'd be all about paints and pigments and the like. We'd just sit about and wait and look at the pictures till our Mother took the people down to the living-room, to eat.

And there they'd all talk and laugh so much Rachel and I would wish more than ever our Mother would come and live with us, keep Father company, make him talk and laugh and be happy with all the people round, instead of the way he lived, with not a soul but us children and Olive to be speaking to at all. For Father seemed to be out of it in every way, nothing to do with our Mother or the friends she had, for all the while they laughed and talked they never so much as once gave a mention to his name. It was like no one knew he was alive at all.

Of course, our Mother's house was not always as gay as that, mind. Other times there'd be no one there, only she and Kathleen, her maid. And it was then I thought she seemed kind of sad. We'd run in at the gate as we always did, leaving Olive to go back home, and our Mother would be standing waiting, the same as she always was, dressed in the dirty blue overall she wore when she worked, and we'd jump up at her and she'd catch us and kiss us, and, holding our hands, take us in.

'Anyone comin' to-day, Mother?' we'd ask.

Once, when she said no, and we said nothing, she looked down at us sudden-like 'Why?' she asked. 'Do you like it when they come?' So we both said we did indeed.

'Why so?' she asked.

'Because it's so dull-like at home,' I said

'How so, Pat?'

'Father never asks anyone,' I said.

'No one at all?'

'Only Father Riordan a time or two on Saturday afternoons,' I said

'And Mr Sullivan—he drops in to supper first Sunday in the month,' said Rachel.

'But we don't like him much,' I said.

'Is yer Father very unhappy then, d'ye think?' our Mother asked

''Tis that way he seems to be,' I said.

'There's only Olive,' said Rachel, 'she plays draughts with

us sometimes in the evenin's, but Father—he doesn't like her, it's rude to her he is '

'Ah, times she has to go to her room in the end,' I said. 'I'm thinkin' he makes her wretched, 'tis barely a word he says to her at all, an' she takin' it to her heart, sorely '

'*Why* doesn't Father ask anyone, Mother?' Rachel asked suddenly.

At that our Mother looked very sad. She stood fidgeting with her hands and looked out of the window like she were seeing something miles away, beyond the sea. And her eyes were watery and her lip kind of drooped. Then she turned back and looked at me and I thought she was going to cry.

'See, Mother,' I said, and I put my hand on hers, 'if *you* came back, we'd—'

But she shook her head very quickly and said what she always said

'No, son, I cannot.'

'Father's awful lonesome,' I began, though I knew I'd said it all before.

But Rachel interrupted

'Why, Mother,' she said, 'why doesn't Father like your friends?'

Our Mother turned then and stared at us

'My friends! He doesn't know them,' she said. 'How can he not like them?'

'He says funny things, I don't understand—' I began.

Our Mother turned quickly. 'What *things*?' she said sudden-like.

'Oh,' I said, and tried to remember, but I couldn't

Then Rachel said, 'He says he knows what you do be up to with them—and he calls them names '

But at that our Mother seemed to get very angry. She turned round, red in the face, and stamped her foot

'He said that in front of you?' she shouted

But we didn't answer or say anything, she looked so cross. And I wished Rachel hadn't spoken

But almost at once she seemed to calm down, and I thought she looked very tired. We both were walking towards the door when she stopped us and said: 'Don't be listenin', you two, to what yer Father says. He's a right good man, an honest man, an' 'tis you must love him, for it's you he loves—but it's not a thing he knows about my friends, so he can't talk, an' it's not heedin' him you must be, see?' And our Mother smiled and sat down, but it was mighty sad she looked, I thought.

'Come then, and give us a kiss,' she said, with her eyes shut and her hands in her lap

So we went over to her, and she got up and stood between us and put her arms round us and hugged us very, very tight, saying no word at all. And while she was hugging us I stared at the floor, feeling gloomy-like, when suddenly, where I was looking, there was a little wet splash from above. So I put up my face, and Lord! our Mother's face was smeared with the tears! I felt bad

'What is it, Mother?' I said

But she let go of us and turned away. 'Ah, nothin' at all, darlin', she said, and she tried to smile. Then she brushed a hand across her face and looked down at Rachel, with the creases on the skin above her eyes

'That's an awful dirty frock you've on,' she said.

'T'other's in the wash,' Rachel said.

'Then is it only the two ye have?' asked our Mother, surprised.

Rachel nodded with her head down. 'Grown out of others,' she said.

'Isn't Olive buyin' you any more?' our Mother asked.

'Dunno,' Rachel said

'Child alive!' exclaimed our Mother, 'Isn't that an awful way to be, entirely! For what is Olive paid at all! In time you'd not have a stitch to yer naked back! 'Deed t's I'll have to come over an' look through yer clothes, so t is!'

And when I heard our Mother say that I jumped at her.

'Oh do, Mother,' I said, 'come over to our house You will, won't you? An' stay to supper along with Father an' us!'

'Then he'll see how nice you are!' said Rachel.

'An' he won't say nasty things,' I said.

Our Mother smiled.

'When will you come, Mother?' I asked, 'it's a fresh shirt I'm needin' too!'

She smiled again, but oh! it was awful sad she looked

'Come along to-night, Mother!' I said, and I gripped her hand. 'Yes, Mother, do!' said Rachel, excited-like She looked down at us, very serious she seemed to be Then she put her hands on our necks and squeezed.

'All right,' she said, 'Just this once I'll come.'

And we ran away to play, feeling very glad.

But in a way I was sorry afterwards she came. For Father wasn't nice: he seemed to be in a bad mood, worse than he'd mostly be And he wouldn't talk to Mother much, only to us See, Father didn't know any of her friends, so it wasn't much good her mentioning them, and our Mother hadn't seen Father Riordan for years, she said, and never once set eyes on Mr Sullivan. So Father couldn't talk to her of them Only once when our Mother did mention Mr. Yorke—and everybody had heard of him because he was a famous man—Father looked across the table at our Mother with a sullen kind of face. Then he turned to us 'Ach!' he said, with a smile I knew meant that what he was going to say wouldn't be either funny or nice. 'Ach, that divil! A man with hair coverin' the whole of his ugly mug, an' well it moight, ter hoide the koinde he is within!'

Our Mother got red and looked very angry at that. She banged her fist a mighty thump upon the table, glaring at Father fit to kill.

'An' might I ask yerself,' she said, 'what it is you have agin the like of Daniel Yorke—one of the finest poets in the land?'

'Ha!' cried Father, and he drank some more whisky and



smiled that smile again. 'It's nicely ye're givin' yerself away, me lass. 'Tis them with the flamin' guilt in their hearts as does be afloyn' into the rages over no dam' thin' at ahl!'

'Nothin' at all, is it!' cried our Mother, her eyes leaping like the stars, 'nothin' at all you call insultin' of my friends—before the innocent childer, too!'

'Aizy, aizy,' said Father, quiet-like, "'tis betther ye kape to yer own house nor raisin' the hell in ours!'

Then he turned to us again. 'Fer it's a quiet an' a clane an' a dacent kind o' loife,' he said, 'that we does be leadin' together here—ain't it, Rachel, eh? There bez no harum-scarum goin's-on along with us, eh, Pat? 'Tis nothin' we do'd shame us before the face o' God, in *our* house! Clane an' roighteous folks we be!'

Then he drank some more whisky and looked at our Mother like he was accusing her of some almighty crime.

And our Mother—her face was all kind of tense and drawn. She shut her eyes and clenched her fists and wouldn't eat nor speak nor drink any more, only sat there in silence and nodded her head when Olive came round with the bowl of evening tea.

Nor was it easy for us to know what to say or do. For Father sat silent too, only humming when Olive came in, and finishing up the bottle of whisky that was new every evening by his arm.

Even at the end of eating and drinking the tea we didn't do anything, just sat in front of the fire, Rachel and I playing draughts, and feeling somehow in the silence it was wiser to whisper nor to speak. For our Mother and Father, sitting on either side of the fire—they said nothing. she a-staring into the flames, all hopeless and sad she looked, and Father half-lying in the easy-chair, reading the *Evening Mail* and puffing away at his pipe.

And when about nine o'clock—it was round that time we usually went up to bed—our Mother got up to go, she just kissed us both and held us tight, then, with not a further word, he walked out of the room and into the night.

So we kissed Father above the eyes as we always did, and went upstairs to bed

But I couldn't sleep for what seemed an age of time. I just lay thinking of the things our Mother and Father had said to each other over the table. I couldn't understand what it was all about, nor why they should fight and say such things and look at each other the way they did. I couldn't make out what it was our Mother had done, nor what was wrong with Mr Yorke—famous man as he was in the land—or any of the others we did meet at her house. I couldn't see what it was Father had against them, they seemed so happy with their talking and laughing and friendly ways. If our Mother liked them and they liked her, how was it at all that Father—though he mightn't write the poetry or paint—couldn't do the same? It was only when he said the nasty things to her that she sent them back at him

No, try as I would, I couldn't make it out any way at all, and I lay there tossing and turning and trying to get the sleep that other times fell on me the way it does in the evenings on the body of a hunting dog

At last it must have been I dozed away, for I was woken of a sudden by a hullabaloo of a row coming from the end of the passage near where it was Olive sewed and slept. A banging noise it was, like something heavy falling, then a sound as someone moaning or crying with the sorrow from a muffled mouth, so dim-like was the murmur of the voice.

Very still I lay, holding my breath, for it was afeard I was, that hour of the night, and the like of that noise in the black darkness. And next it was Father's voice I heard, raised high in an angered tone

'There!' he was shouting, 'an' let that be the last toime! Three year next month it is, an' three year too many of yer whinin', wheedlin' ways!'

Then two doors banged, and our house was as silent and still again as the palms and the sea outside

Afeared I was, all a-tremble with the wondering at

Father's voice raised high that way in his anger; but somehow sleep fell on me and next I knew it was morning

I asked Rachel then did she hear Father in the night, but no she said, she did not 'It's dreamin' you were,' she said. And when I told her I was as wide awake as I'd ever been, she insisted it was the nonsense I was after talking.

I looked at Father at breakfast and I looked at Olive, but not a stir did I see in them, so I thought it wise to hold my peace till I saw our Mother later on.

But when I told her and asked her did she think there was something wrong—Oh Lord in His Heaven, raving crazy I thought she was going to be.

She was standing painting when I said it, and we sitting in the window watching, as sometimes we did. I said again the words I'd heard Father say, and that it was to Olive it seemed they were said

'Three *what?*' she screamed, '*Olive!*'

Then she stood stock still with her mouth wide open, staring the way a horse does with its head over a gate, but like as she was seeing nothing, only maybe thinking hard, and her face gone white as a new tooth, so that I thought she was going to faint

'Mother!' I cried, wondering what good I could do. But when I spoke she seemed to kind of brace herself, for she stood up very straight, bit her lip, clenched her hands, then, looking fierce as a fighting ferret, she leapt at her canvas, hauled it down, and tore it into shreds, like paper it might have been. And she cursing fit for no one's ears at all: 'The swine! The dirty, filthy, lyn' swine!'

And Rachel and I—we just stood agape, struck dumb as the saying is, the while she paced up and down, then rushed from the room, cursing still with the raging fury.

After that day it was never a good word she had for Father, only the nasty things we heard from one or the other, in whichever house we were, and it was never quite the same she seemed, for we never again saw the sadness on our Mother's face at the sound of Father's name.

## *The Falls*

BY L. A. G. STRONG

(From *Nash's—Pall Mall Magazine*)

ONCE it had conquered the hill, the road spilled down a short incline and ran along the level, parallel to the river that wound hidden in the gorge below. Free-wheeling thankfully down the incline, the girl let her machine lose momentum on the level. Just before it must have stopped, she jumped off, leaned it against a low grass bank beside the road, and stooped as if to tighten her shoelace. Actually, it needed no tightening. While her fingers untied and did it up again, she was glancing backwards along the road, lest by any chance she was being followed. Satisfied, she straightened up again rather stiffly, and the movement produced a crackling sound. Wincing half humorously, she patted a place where her figure seemed to have developed an odd bulge. Secreted about her were various parcels of food, and it was the stiff grease-proof paper in which they were wrapped that gave off the cracklings. After a final glance up and down, she picked up her bicycle, lifted it quickly across the bank, and hid it in a ditch on the far side. Then, with all the speed she could command, she took a small basket from the handlebars, scrambled out of the ditch, sat on top of the low stone wall, and swung her neat little legs across. An instant later road, bank, and wall were empty again.

Once over the wall, the girl started to make her way gingerly down the rough bank that sloped to the river. It was too steep to go down straight: she edged her way along, descending at an angle. At the bottom, maybe a hundred and fifty feet below the wall, ran an irregular level strip, half grass, half boulders, never more than a few yards wide, along which was worn a narrow path.

When she had climbed down thirty or forty feet, the girl turned, and tacked in the opposite direction. To go forwards all the way was impossible, for the bank became virtually a

cliff. Here, it was grass, with outcrops of rock every few yards there, it was almost all rock. The shoes she was wearing were not suited to climbing. They found the grass treacherous enough. She went down slowly, with almost ignominious care, sitting down every now and then and sliding over a tricky bit, braking herself with hands and heels, the handle of the basket between her teeth. It was ungraceful, but safe. She was taking no chances.

Five minutes' more zigzagging, and she reached the bottom. Straightening herself up, rubbing the earth from her palms, she gave a sigh of relief, then glanced anxiously about her. She was a pleasant-looking girl, fair, clear-skinned, neatly made, with eyes of an almost piercing blue, not pretty, for the nose was too firmly tip tilted and the mouth too wide. Moreover, there were hard lines on the smooth skin: lines drawn from nose to mouth, lines on the forehead, and about the eyes. Lines that told, not of age, but of premature care. There were many like her to be seen up and down Ireland in those years, many who wore the same alert, strained expression, and went about the countryside on errands as mysterious, setting out by day or night with parcels of food, and returning without them: sometimes never returning.

Satisfied that she was unobserved, the girl began with anxious haste to pick blackberries and put them into her basket. There were not many. Someone had evidently been before her. She bit her lip and looked irresolutely about. There, some distance above, was a bush covered with beauties. She scrambled up, barking her shin against a rock, and pulled enough to cover the bottom of the shallow basket.

'There,' she said to herself grimly. 'That'll have to do.'

To get down without spilling the berries was not easy, but she managed it, and, with another careful glance to right and left, began to walk slowly along the path towards the cliff. Before it reached the cliff, the river began to widen, and spread out into a deep, long pool. Dark as ale, alive

with little evil swirls and eddies, the water seemed at first hardly to flow at all. Then, quite suddenly, it quickened, wriggled, broke into bigger and livelier eddies, and, where the cliff reached out into a single, pillar-like bluff, the whole great floor of water slid hideously over a black edge into nothingness, crashing down thirty feet into the foam and thunder of the falls.

The falls were some distance ahead of Eileen. She could see the edge of water break off clean against the sky, and, beyond it, clouds of spray rising faint and ethereal from the rocks below. She gave a quick shudder, and transferred her attention to the face of the cliff. Though almost sheer, it was uneven. Fissures and clefts ran up it. Bushes sprouted out here and there from its face, striving upwards, suggesting hollows behind. Fifty feet up, a mountain ash rose, in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity, its berries standing out against the cool silvery grey of the rock. At the foot of the cliff were more bushes, and here and there a mass of pale green ivy.

Reaching a clear space just past the mountain ash, the girl halted, looked once more up and down, put a hand to her mouth, and uttered an amazingly lifelike imitation of an owl's hoot. Then she stood still. Her lips moved, she was counting. At once the roar of the falls seemed to grow tenfold, filling the ravine with insupportable noise. When she had counted thirty, the girl hooted again.

'Early for owls, isn't it?' said a deep voice behind her ear.

Eileen started as if she had been shot, and turned, a hand on her heart.

'Denis!' Her face went dead pale, then colour and breath returned together. 'Denis!' She tried to smile. 'How you made me jump!'

A man well over six feet in height, dark, unshaven, with brilliant eyes, stood regarding her in ironical amusement. He was wearing an old navy-blue trench coat, practically buttonless, and held together by a Sam Browne belt. It bulged loosely open at the neck, revealing a soft collar, none

too clean, that did not match the shirt, and an incongruously neat bow tie. A soft felt hat, pulled down over one eye, made his expression even more ironic and sinister.

'Hardly the answer you were expecting, eh?'

She stared, her heart turning cold.

'Hardly the answer—?'

'To your pretty little imitation—of course,' he sneered. 'And what might you be doing hereabouts?'

Without speaking she held up the blackberry basket.

'I see. When you come here in the evening, I suppose it's to gather mushrooms?'

Eileen heard herself laugh.

'I don't know what on earth you're talking about.'

'No? That's a pity.'

He stood, nodding his head, looking her up and down. For a few moments neither spoke. Glad of a chance to control her wits and pulses, Eileen faced him squarely. More than his sudden appearance had disturbed her Denis Lenehan, with his sulky good looks and rasping bass voice, had always been able to play a queer tune upon her heartstrings. From time to time he had blarneyed her, as he had every other presentable girl in the neighbourhood, only to sheer off moodily for months at a stretch; going off to the woods or the mountains, out all night, returning *farouche* and unshaven to his work the next morning, and replying to all questions with a snarl or silence. He would drive a girl mad with excitement at her garden's end, and pass her next day in the village street as if he had never seen her before. He was incalculable, maddening, yet all but irresistible when he chose. Eileen had time and again told herself that she was past that nonsense now, but the sound of his voice had a treacherous way of making something in her go back on all her resolutions.

She knew him better than any of them. She, Denis, and her cousin Johnny Beirne had grown up together. Johnny had always adored her, and she as a child had taken this for granted, just as he, without jealousy, had taken for

granted that there would be days when she liked Denis best. Denis, for his part, if he valued Eileen at all (and she knew there were times when no one else could fit his mood), did not take Johnny seriously. He never looked upon him as a rival. Many happy days the three spent together, picnicking till dusk, walking in the woods, beside this very river, arguing, laughing, talking, lying for long spells silent, looking up at the sky, content in each other's company. Denis had provided the spice and colour of those days; even Johnny admitted that. Yet, when they grew older, it was to the steady unexciting Johnny that she turned. Now they were secretly engaged, and only some wildness in her reached every now and then towards the wild Denis, divining his moods, able to understand his eccentricities.

And yet—how strangely, how unaccountably things worked out!—when the troubles came, it was Johnny, quiet, reliable Johnny, who turned Republican, and Denis a fanatical Free Stater. Denis, of all unlikely men, represented the forces of law and order. It was Johnny who was on the run. The old happy trio was broken for ever. Denis and Johnny were enemies. They would be pitiless to one another. Standing there, defiantly returning Denis's ironic stare, Eileen summoned her wits. She was fighting for Johnny, she would need them all.

With an abrupt movement she tossed back her head, and smiled.

'I haven't seen you for a long time, Denis.'

'We don't meet as often as we did.'

'You're so mysterious, these days. So stand-offish. You never come to the dances, now.'

His mouth twisted.

'I've other things to do. Sounds funny to you, doesn't it?'

'No. Why?'

'I shall be forgetting how to dance, if I'm not careful. No practice, you know. That's bad.' A strange gleam came into his eyes. 'I tell you what. It's nice and level here. Let's have a turn.'



He reached out for her, and she recoiled in terror. If he took hold of her he would feel the packages of food. At her recoil his eyes lit up with mocking comprehension.

'Come on. Don't be bashful. I know I'm hardly dressed for the part—but then, neither are you. Come on. You look as if you'd be all the better for a little exercise.' He cocked his head on one side, eyeing a suspicious bulge. 'Putting on weight, aren't you?'

He knew

'*Dems!* What a thing to say to a poor girl!'

'Forgetting my manners, eh? Well, maybe I've cause.'

'You usen't to speak to me that way in the old days.'

'Two strings to your bow is all very well for peace time. In war, one of them's apt to snap.'

'What do you mean?'

'Precisely what I say. I suppose, though'—he glanced suggestively up at the face of the cliff—'since one of them doesn't seem to be available, you are trying to make do as best you can with the other.'

And, as she felt the blood rise to her cheeks, he began to hum derisively, 'Johnny, I hardly knew ye.'

'I don't see why you need be offensive.'

'When Johnny comes marching home again, hurroo, hurroo,' he sang, and laughed. 'But Johnny knows better than to come marching home. A wise fella, Johnny. He's skulking somewhere.' He turned away from her, and shouted up at the face of the cliff. 'He's skulking in some hole, the dirty coward, afraid to come out! Having ratted one way, he's hiding like a rat.'

'How dare you! How dare you say that! Johnny's as true to his beliefs as you are to yours. He—'

'Oh, spare us all that tripe, for God's sake. The patriot! The man of unsullied faith! I have it all by heart, thanks. The fact remains, our bold Johnny is snug in hiding, and lets a girl run his risks for him. The coward!'

'I won't stop and listen to you a moment longer. Let me pass, please.'

'And suppose I tell you I'm on guard here?'

'Will you please let me pass?'

'Look here, young woman' He stood, arms akimbo, looking down at her 'Get this into your head There are times when a woman's whims can be respected, and life can be run to include them. There are other times when woman's stuff and chivalry and civilised conventions aren't worth a tinker's damn and this is one of them'

'That's the first article in the creed of you and your new associates.'

His face darkened She had flicked him at last

'There's nothing new about my convictions—as you call them.'

'Oh! Isn't there? My mistake'

He looked at her evilly, and swallowed

'Pardon me for drawing your attention to the fact, but there happens to be a war on'

'A war against women?'

He grinned 'The position of women in war time has always been equivocal They exist, primarily, to comfort the warrior. That's a good idea. Let's make a start on the comforting process Give me a kiss.'

Eileen backed away, breathing quickly

'Leave me alone,' she said in a small voice

Denis laughed

'The warrior, after weeks of privation, is not to be denied. Come on. What's wrong? You usen't to be so particular.'

Bounding forward, quick as a cat, he caught her, and swung her from the ground A moment later he was kissing her fiercely, his stubby chin rasping against her face. Paralysed for a moment, she began to struggle, but he held her arms fast against her sides. She kicked viciously at his shins, and then, while her heart still cried in shame and disgust, an old traitorous weakness invaded her body, turning her bones to water Her struggles weakened.

Then, before she had lost all identity, the bushes some distance up the cliff face parted, a figure burst out, and with

a wild rush slid down, alighting close beside them. Wheeling at the sound, Denis saw a short, thick-set man, with white face, scrambling to his feet.

'Fetched him, by God!' he shouted exultantly; and thrust his right hand into the pocket of his trench coat. But before he could raise it, Eileen was on him, seizing the arm and hanging on tight with all her weight.

'Let go, you little fool. Let *go!*'

The powerful muscles swung her as if she had been a kitten, but she refused to be shaken off. With a curse he lifted her bodily, and transferred the revolver to his left hand. Desperate, fighting mad, Eileen snatched at the up-lifted hand. She caught it, and in an instant had fastened her teeth deep into the wrist.

What happened then she was not quite sure. There was a curse, a galvanic motion, and she was flung spinning and fell with a crash upon the ground. Sitting up, her head buzzing from the impact, she saw Johnny spring upon Denis like a tiger and bear him backwards to the ground. At the same moment she saw, with a gasp of relief, that the revolver had dropped from Denis's hand.

The two men rolled over and over, fighting savagely. The momentum of his attack had for the moment given Johnny the advantage. He lay uppermost, striving madly to get his hands round Denis's throat. Eileen bit her lip in terror. She knew that Denis was much the stronger man. Denis knew it too. Taken at a disadvantage he fought patiently, a grin on his face, waiting for his chance to get a purchase which would enable him to exercise his strength. It came. Seizing one of Johnny's wrists, with a sudden twist he forced it away and held it out at full length, pulling Johnny's face almost on top of his own. A convulsion of his long frame, a stabbing of heels into the ground, and he was on top. But Johnny, as if possessed, hooked him suddenly in the jaw with his clinched fist, and the two rolled over and over, like cats, kicking and clawing at one another.

As she watched, something extraordinary happened to

Eileen For the first few seconds she had stared in blank incredulity, as at a nightmare It could not be that those two snarling, cursing men were Denis and Johnny—*her* Denis and Johnny—whom she had known from childhood, with whom she had spent such long and happy days It was impossible. She had only to pinch herself and wake up. Then memory collapsed, and, sudden as a lightning flash, new knowledge struck her heart The pair ceased to be a pair There was only the man she loved, fighting for life against his enemy With a sob for her folly, she remembered the revolver and scrambled to her feet to get it

She was too late With a mighty heave Denis shook off his opponent, placed a foot against his chest, and thrust him back a couple of yards Rolling over, with a grin of triumph, he lunged out for the revolver Recovering himself, Johnny sat up just in time to see him reach it At the sight, something happened to his face—and something happened to Eileen.

She never afterwards knew what it was She could never explain it It was part inspiration, part the snapping of control tested to its uttermost by weeks and weeks of strain All that was certain is that she did the one thing in the world which could have distracted the two men from their battle Uttering a shrill scream, she turned, ran to the edge of the river, and jumped in.

Instantly she felt the current An eddy caught her, twirling her round, pulling mercilessly at her, till she thought she would never rise Then at last, her lungs bursting, the blood roaring in her ears, she came up, already several yards from the bank.

Hearing her scream, the two men turned involuntarily For a moment her action had no meaning for them They gaped open-mouthed, their fight forgotten.

Johnny was the first to recover He got up, coughing, a hand to his side

'Blast your soul,' he gasped 'You have winded me'

And without more ado he staggered to the edge and dived in

Luckily, he landed flat. The eddy pulled, but it did not get him under. Shaking his head, revived by the shock of the water, he saw Eileen, and struck out towards her.

It took Denis some seconds to adjust his mind to events. He remained on all fours, his jaw dropped, gazing at the pair in the water. He saw Johnny reach Eileen, and take her by the shoulders from behind. He saw the two heads floating downstream. Then Johnny's head worked round towards the shore. He was swimming on his back, fighting to get clear of the ever-strengthening pull of the current. The two heads moved faster.

Coming out of his trance, Denis sprang to his feet and rushed down the bank. Yelling something incoherent as he passed them, he charged ahead to where, just above the brink of the falls, a tiny mountain ash was growing between two boulders. Leaping down, he grasped and furiously tried to break it off. The green, live stem resisted. Savagely he tugged and wrenched, jugging it this way and that. The bark split, but the mangled fibres held. Turning to look over his shoulder, Denis saw the two heads swinging perilously near. With a last frenzied effort, that tore the skin from his hands, he flung himself to one side. The branch snapped, and he all but fell into the river. Then, stretching out flat on his face across a projecting boulder, he stretched the branch out as far as he could over the water—just in time.

Johnny was spent. His fight had knocked the breath out of him. Eileen, weighted down with the packages in her clothes, could be of little help. Helpless in the grip of the current, they were twirled round and round.

The end of the branch dropped a yard in front of them. Releasing a hand, Johnny grabbed it.

'Hang on tight.'

'Yes,' gasped Johnny. 'Eileen, can you grip too?'

Eileen heard the words as if from far away. She reached out and grasped instinctively. Her hand closed upon leaves and twigs; she held on.

Then came the pull of the current. As the branch felt it, and the two were swung in against the rock, Denis's arm was almost wrenched from its socket. Digging in toes and knees, his fingers on the rock feeling as if they must crack from the strain, he somehow contrived to hold on.

'Can you—catch hold?'

'Just a minute. Yes. Wait. I've got a foothold.'

The intolerable strain eased. Denis, sobbing for breath, his arms shaking, weakly helped the two to scramble upon the rocks.

For a full minute no one spoke. The three sat in attitudes of utter exhaustion, like spent animals, labouring for breath. They looked at each other, but without expression. Then, slowly, the faces of the two men became human. Something like a grin dawned upon each.

'Well,' panted Denis at last. 'Here's a pretty kettle of fish.'

Eileen tried to speak, coughed weakly, and leaned forward. She had swallowed a good deal of water. The next thing that she knew was that the two were holding her up between them and patting her on her back.

'Thanks! Thanks! That's enough! I'm all right now.' She sat back, half laughing, half crying.

'Well,' repeated Denis, 'we've got ourselves into a pretty mess between us.'

Johnny grinned.

'I'd rather be here than where we should be at this minute, if you hadn't pulled us out.'

Denis sat bolt upright.

'Eileen, you little devil,' he said severely, 'what on earth did you go and do that for? Giving us both a turn.'

Eileen laughed uncertainly.

'Well,' she said, 'I had to stop you somehow,' and instantly regretted the words, for at the memory of their fight the two men's faces clouded.

'Do you remember the last time we three sat here?' she went on, saying the first thing that came into her head in her anxiety to distract them.

Johnny knit his brows.

'I can't say I do.'

'Oh, you must. You can't have forgotten. *You* do, Denis, anyway?'

'Yes. Yes. I believe I do. One June, it was. We had a picnic here. It was in the evening. I remember the moon coming up over the trees.'

'Oh yes.' Johnny's face cleared. 'I remember. There was a big fish lepping in the pool. We had an argument about him.'

'Yes,' Eileen said, 'till Denis got cross and threw stones, and frightened him away.'

'That was right. I remember. A grand evening.' Denis looked from one to the other of the dripping pair. 'Well, we're hardly in time for a picnic now. Your fault again, Eileen. You've spoiled the food.'

'Yes.' Making a wry face, she turned her back, and after some fumbling produced a couple of sodden packages. 'The fruit will be all right, Johnny,' she said apologetically, 'and the chocolate. I'm afraid the sandwiches won't be very nice.'

Johnny grinned.

'Thanks,' he said, 'but—'

He broke off, and both of them looked at Denis. Perfectly understanding the look, he shrugged his shoulders.

'What the hell are we to do?'

Helplessly they stared at one another. Denis's brow clouded.

'Think of something, Eileen,' he commanded.

Eileen looked at him.

'Well,' she began slowly. 'We're in your hands. It's for you to—'

'Hsst!'

Holding up a hand suddenly, he sat with strained attention, listening.

'I thought I heard something,' he whispered.

Johnny made a grimace.

'It's the falls,' he said. 'I've had plenty of time to listen

to them I don't know how many times, when I've come out to stretch my legs, I've run back, thinking I heard voices; and it was only that cursed water.'

Denis did not look satisfied.

'I think I'll take a look, all the same,' he said. 'Wait you here'

Rising, he ran lightly on his toes to the corner of the bluff above the falls, and looked around it down the bank. There sounded a hail, unmistakable this time, and the horrified couple saw him wave and shout in answer. Casually he turned—and then came leaping back

'It's some of our—my chaps,' he said 'Quick, the two of you! Hide! There. In the bushes Anywhere Quick!'

For an instant Johnny hesitated, looking at him. Then he seized Eileen by the arm, and the two scurried like rabbits into the thick screen of bushes, pushing their way in, and crouching breathless against the wall of rock. Listening with thudding hearts, they heard Denis begin to whistle. Eileen peered out through a gap, and saw him stroll casually along, pick up his revolver, and slip it back into his pocket. He turned, and looked around. Evidently his friends were not yet in sight.

Suddenly Eileen seized Johnny's hand.

'My basket,' she whispered

Luckily, at that very instant, Denis caught sight of it. With a lightning glance about him, he bounded forward, picked it up, and swiftly stuffed it into a hole between two stones. Then he straightened up, looking towards the bluff, shading his eyes against the sun.

'Hullo, Matt,' he called 'Hullo, Jim.'

'Hullo,' came a gruff answer, so close in front of the bushes that the two listeners jumped. 'What the blazes are ye doing here?'

'Faith,' replied Denis, 'you may well ask I'm beginning to wonder myself'

'Making a fool of yourself as usual, I suppose,' said another voice, on a note of surly good-humour.



'Making a fool of myself as usual,' repeated Denis. 'You've hit the nail on the head, Billy But you won't guess why.'

'What's all this?' exclaimed the second voice, and the pair in hiding could tell from the sound that the speaker's back was towards them 'Have you been bathing, or what?'

'The water,' whispered Johnny in Eileen's ear. 'Where we've dripped I hope to God there's no trail'

They heard Denis laugh

'That's just what I was going to tell you,' he said. 'There was a dog in the river, being swept away, and like the soft-hearted fool I am I lugged the brute out This is what I got for my pains' He held out his wrist

'Serve you right,' grunted the first voice

'Where's the dog?'

'Ask me another. He ran away up the bank some place'

'Well,' said the man who had spoken first 'If we meet him, we'll give him something to remember you by.'

'Where are you going?'

'Further up. I've an idea or two in my head. Are you coming with us?'

'No I'll stay here I may follow you presently.'

'What the hell do you want to stay here for?'

'Maybe I've an idea in my head too.'

'Would you like me to stop with you?' asked a fourth voice, 'and see could we think it out together?'

'No, thanks.'

'Two heads are better than one, you know.'

'That's supposing they're both of the same quality.'

There was a little more talk and laughter, and then through her gap Eileen got a brief sight of the party of men moving off upstream. They turned around, screwing up their faces against the sun, calling out rough banter to Denis She pulled the branch a little to one side to watch them out of sight—and then suddenly Johnny seized her in his arms, kissing her furiously in his relief. For a moment she struggled, lest Denis come and find them Then she abandoned herself utterly.

It might have been any time later, though actually it could only have been two or three minutes, when the pair came to their senses to hear a perfect imitation of Eileen's owl-cry. Waiting till it sounded a second time, she replied.

'All clear,' came the deep voice of Denis 'You can come out now'

Cautiously the two pushed their way out, and stood, brushing dust and prickles from their hair and necks Denis's expression had changed It was more hard and sardonic.

Johnny went up to him and held out his hand

'Thank you, Denis,' he said simply. 'I owe you my life.'

'The hell you do' Denis did not take the hand 'What do you think of me now?' he asked Eileen bitterly. 'Do you like what you've made of me? A traitor?'

'Don't say that,' said Eileen quickly. 'You've been loyal to something else'

'A traitor. No, thanks very much, I don't want any of your pretty speeches I know it, and you know it.'

Johnny stood back His hand dropped to his side

'I'm sorry you feel that way about it,' he said.

'How else can I feel, man? Ask yourself.'

Then, as Johnny made no answer, 'You and I must settle this, Beirne. It can't stay as it is.'

Johnny looked him in the eyes.

'Right,' he answered.

Denis turned to Eileen 'Leave us for a bit, will you?'

'Must I, Johnny?'

'Yes, darling, please. Only for a few minutes.'

'You're not going to fight again, are you?' she asked, looking in misery from one to the other.

'No.' A smile twisted Denis's face. 'We're not going to fight. I promise you that.'

'You needn't go far,' added Johnny. 'Just go down there, round the corner. Just round the bluff.'

Disconsolate, she went a few steps, and then turned.

'How shall I know when you're ready for me?' she asked.

'One or other of us will come and tell you. Go on now, please. There's a good girl. The sooner you're gone, the sooner we can settle it.'

With a last imploring look at her lover, Eileen turned and made her way around the corner of the bluff, stepping carefully over the big boulders. Looking sideways, she saw the green, whizzing water of the fall, and turned away with a shudder. She scrambled down the path beside it, went along a hundred yards or so, and sat on a boulder to wait.

What a nightmare life had become, she thought dully, staring into the swirling, broken water. Who would have dreamed that the peace of the last few years could be so hideously broken? It seemed fantastic, beyond belief; just as, to anyone looking at the placid reaches of the river a few hundred yards upstream, this leaping anarchy of foam would seem impossible. The violence of a few terrible years had distorted the whole current of life, turned it awry, and those who had drifted along in happiness together were separated, carried helpless in different directions, sent spinning this way and that, to collide presently as enemies and strangers. Oh, she asked herself bitterly for the thousandth time, why had it all to be? How was it possible that men who loved the one country should be so savagely at odds with one another?

A sharp sound made her jump. For a moment she gazed apprehensively upstream, then she concluded it must have been the falls. It was true, what Johnny had said. The moment you began to listen to them, they played all kinds of tricks upon your hearing. She strained her ears, and turned quite cold, thinking she heard voices. Next, the voices seemed to change to chuckles of evil laughter. Then there was nothing again, but the roar of the water. If I stayed here long, she thought, my nerve would go all to pieces. Poor Johnny! What a time he must have had, listening day in, day out, to these noises, waking with a jump in the night.

Surely they must be ready now? Unable to wait longer,

she rose to her feet, and began to stroll uncertainly towards the falls. Then, with a shock like flame, realisation hit her. 'One or other of us will come and tell you.' One or other! Why not both? Because, you little fool, because—

Frantically she ran forward. Before she had gone more than a few yards a figure appeared. With a great sob of joy and thanksgiving she saw that it was Johnny. Motioning her to stay where she was, he climbed down the rocky path and came towards her. His face was white, his eyes set and staring.

'What has happened? Where is Denis?'

He jerked his thumb back over his shoulder, and swallowed. He was scarcely able to speak.

'Up there,' he whispered. 'He—he's dead.'

'Dead?' The inside of her mouth went dry. She touched her lips with her tongue, and they felt like cardboard.

'Oh, Johnny! You didn't kill him?'

Johnny shook his head.

'No. We put the revolver on the ground between us, and tossed for it. He won. He reached out and picked it up. I shut my eyes. Then there was a shot. I felt nothing, so I opened my eyes again. He had shot himself instead of me.'

'Oh, Johnny.'

'I never knew—I never dreamed he was going to do it. I wish—' He broke off miserably, and stared at Eileen. Frowning, her hands clasped behind her, she began to pace up and down, stopping every now and then to kick the ground. Suddenly she looked up at him, her eyes blazing.

'I wish this country and everyone in it was under the sea,' she exclaimed passionately. 'All this suspicion and killing, all this hiding, this persecution, this cruelty. We're all to blame. We're all as bad as one another. We—'

'Hush, not so loud.' He caught her by the arm, glancing about him fearfully. 'Not so loud. Someone might hear us.'

Eileen shook his arm off and laughed bitterly.

'They'd only think it was the falls. They make all sorts of noises. They— *Johnny!*'

'Yes?'

'The noise! The shot! Denis's friends! They'll have heard it!'

He stared at her.

'Surely not, with the noise of the falls.'

'But it was above the falls, and so are they! I thought I heard it, down here I'm sure I did. Oh, get back, before they come!'

'What about you?'

'I'll be all right Run, for God's sake, quick!'

He stood dazed. His mind seemed to have stopped working.

'The food! Have you—?'

'I'll bring some more! To-morrow—to-night—anything you like Only run, run!'

He turned and ran, stumbling like a drunken man. It was too late. Just as he began to climb, to Eileen's horrified ears came the sound of angry shouting. A moment later, and figures appeared round the bluff, Denis's companions, their faces dark with rage. Instantly catching sight of Johnny, they burst into savage cries, and the foremost covered him with a revolver. The figure of the climber stopped and stood forlorn, raising his hands.

Eileen froze with horror. Then desperate life returned to her.

'Oh, no,' she screamed. 'No, no! Please! He didn't do it! Denis did it himself. It wasn't Johnny that killed him, I swear. Oh, please, please *listen!*'

She stopped short, and crammed her knuckles into her mouth, realising the full hopelessness of it all, the impossibility of making them believe. With the body of their comrade before them they did not want to believe.

Now that the thing had come which for weeks she had imagined, the dread of which had printed those lines upon her face; now that the blow had fallen, the lines were wiped out, and her face, blank with its despair, went suddenly smooth and pitiful as a child's.

## *The Visitor*

BY DYLAN THOMAS

(From *The Criterion*)

HIS hands were weary, though all night they had lain over the sheets of his bed and he had moved them only to his mouth and his wild heart. The veins ran, unhealthily blue streams, into the white sea. Milk at his side steamed out of a chipped cup

He smelt the morning, and knew that cocks in the yard were putting back their heads and crowing at the sun. What were the sheets around him if not the covering sheets of the dead? What was the busy-voiced clock, sounding between photographs of mother and dead wife, if not the voice of an old enemy? Time was merciful enough to let the sun shine on his bed, and merciless to chime the sun away when even more he needed the red light and the clear heat.

Millicent was attendant on a dead man, and put the chipped edge of the cup to a dead lip. It could not be a heart that beat under the ribs. Hearts do not beat in the dead. While he had lain ready for the inch tape and the acid, Millicent had cut open his chest with a book-knife, torn out the heart, put in the clock. He heard her say for the third time 'Drink the lovely milk.' And feeling it run half sour over his tongue, and her hand caress his forehead, he knew he was not dead. He was a living man. For many miles the months flowed into the years, rounding the dry days.

Callaghan to-day would sit and talk with him. He heard in his brain the voices of Callaghan and Millicent battle until he slept, and tasted the blood of words. His hands were weary. He brooded his long, white body, marking the ribs stick through the sides. The hands had held other hands and thrown a ball high into the air. Now they were dead hands. He could let them rest untingling on his belly or wind them in his hair or lose them in the valley between

the breasts of Millicent. It did not matter what he did with them. They were as dead as the hands of the clock, and moved to clockwork.

'Shall I close the windows until the sun's warmer?' said Millicent.

'I'm not cold.'

He would tell her that the dead feel neither cold nor warmth, sun and wind could never penetrate his cloths. But she would laugh in her kind way and kiss him on the forehead and say to him: 'Peter, what's getting you down? You'll be out and about one day.'

One day he would walk on the Jarvis hills like a boy's ghost, and hear the people say: 'There walks the ghost of Peter, a poet, who was dead for years before they buried him.'

Millicent tucked the sheets around his shoulders, gave him a morning kiss, and carried the chipped cup away.

A man with a brush had drawn a rib of colour under the sun and painted many circles around the circle of the sun. Death was a man with a scythe, but that summer day no living stalk was to be cut down.

The invalid waited for his visitor. Peter waited for Callaghan. His room was a world within a world. A world in him went round and round, and a sun rose in him and a moon fell. Callaghan was the west wind, and Millicent blew away the chills of the west wind like a wind from Tahiti.

He let his hand rest on his head, stone on stone. Never had the voice of Millicent been so remote as when it told him that the sour milk was lovely. What was she but a sweetheart talking mad to her sweetheart under a coffin of garments? Somebody in the night had turned him up and emptied him of all but a false heart. That under the ribs' armour was not his, not his the beating of a vein in the foot. His arms could no longer make their movements nor a circle around a girl to shield her from winds and robbers. There was nothing more remote under the sun than his own

name, and poetry was a string of words strung on a bean-stick. With his lips he rounded a little ball of sound into some shape, and spoke a word.

There was no to-morrow for dead men. He could not think that after the next night and its sleeping, life would sprout up again like a flower through a coffin's cracks.

His room around him was a vast place. From their frames the lying likenesses of women looked down on him. That was the face of his mother, that nearly yellow oval in its frame of old gold and thinning hair. And next to her dead Mary. Though Callaghan blew hard, the walls around Mary would never fall down. He thought of her as she had been, remembered her, Darling, Peter, Darling, and her smiling eyes.

He remembered he had not smiled since that night, seven years ago, when his heart had trembled so violently within him that he had fallen to the ground. Clouds had meant much. There had been strengthening in the unbelievable setting of the sun. Over the hill and the roof went the broad moons, and summer came after spring. How had he lived at all when Callaghan had not blown away the webs of the world with a great shout, and Millicent spread her loveliness about him? But the dead need no friends. He peered over the turned coffin lid. Stiff and straight, a man of wax stared back. Taking away the pennies from those dead eyes, he looked on his own face.

'Breed, cardboard on cardboard,' he had cried, 'before I blow down your paste huts with one bellow out of my lungs.' When Mary came, there was nothing between the changing of the days but the divinity he had built around her. His child killed Mary in her womb. He felt his body turn to vapour, and men who had been light as air walked, metal-hooved, through and beyond him.

He started to cry. 'Millicent, Millicent, someone has upped and kicked me in the side. Drip, drip goes my blood in me. Millicent,' he cried.

She hurried upstairs, and time and time over again wiped away the tears on his cheeks with the sleeve of her dress.



He lay still as the morning matured and grew up into a noble noon. Millicent came in and out, her dress, he smelt as she bent over him, smelling of clover and milk. With a new surprise he followed her cool movements about the room, the sweep of her hands as she brushed the dead Mary in her frame. With such surprise, he thought, do the dead follow the movements of the quick, marking the bloom under the living skin. She should be singing as she moved from mantelpiece to window, putting things right, or should be humming like a bee about her work. But if she had spoken, or laughed, or struck her nails against the thin metal of the candlesticks, drawing forth a bell note, or if the room had been suddenly crowded with the noises of birds, he would have wept again. It pleased him to look upon the unmoving waves of the bedclothes, and think himself an island set in the sea. Upon this island of rich and miraculous plants, the seeds grown fruits hung from the trees and, smaller than apples, dropped with the pacific winds on to the ground to lie there and be the harbourers of the summer slugs.

And thinking of the island set somewhere in the south chambers, he thought of water and longed for water. Millicent's dress, rustling about her, made the soft noise of water. He called her over to him and touched the bosom of her dress, feeling the water on his hands. Water, he told her, and told her how, as a boy, he had lain on the rocks, his fingers tracing cool shapes on the surfaces of the pools. She brought him water in a glass, and held the glass up level with his eyes so that he could see the room through a wall of water. He did not drink, and she set the glass aside. Now on a summer day, soon after noon, he wished again for water to close utterly about him, to be no island set above the water, but a green place under, staring around a dizzy cavern. He thought of some cool words, and made a line about an olive tree that grew under a lake. But the tree was a tree of words, and the lake rhymed with another word.

'Sit and read to me, Millicent.'

'After you have eaten,' she said, and brought him food. He could not think that she had gone down into the kitchen and, with her own hands, prepared his meal. She had gone and had returned with food, as simply as a maiden out of the Old Testament. Her name meant nothing. It was a cool sound. She had a strange name out of the Bible. Such a woman, with cool and competent fingers that touched on the holes like ten blessings, washed the body after it had been taken from the tree. He could cry out to her: 'Put a sweet herb under my arm. With your spittle make me fragrant.'

'What shall I read you?' she asked, when at last she sat by his side.

He shook his head, not caring what she read so long as he could hear her speak and think of nothing but the inflections of her voice.

'Oh, gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head,  
And gentle sleep the sleep of death, and gentle hear the  
voice  
Of Him that walketh in the garden in the evening time.'

She read on until the Worm sat on the Lily's leaf.

Death lay over his limbs again, and he closed his eyes. There was no ease from pain nor from the figures of death that went about their familiar business even in the dark-nesses of the half-heavy lids.

'Shall I kiss you awake?' said Callaghan. His hand was cold on Peter's hand.

'And all the lepers kissed,' said Peter, and fell to wondering what he had meant.

Millicent saw that he was no longer listening to her, and went on tiptoes away.

Callaghan, left alone, leant over the bed and spread the soft ends of his fingers on Peter's eyes. 'Now it is night,' he said. 'Where shall we go to-night?'

Peter opened his eyes again, saw the spreading fingers and

the candles glowing about his sheets like the heads of poppies. A fear and a blessing were on the room.

The candles must not be blown out, he thought. There must be light, light, light. Wick and wax must never be low. All day and all night the three candles, like three girls, must blush over my bed. These three red girls must shelter me.

The first flame danced and then went. Over the second and the third flame Callaghan pursed his grey mouth. The room was dark. 'Where shall we go to-night?' he said, but waited for no answer, pulling the sheets back from the bed and lifting Peter in his arms. His coat was damp and sweet on Peter's face.

'Oh, Callaghan, Callaghan,' said Peter. He felt the movements of Callaghan's body, the tense, the relaxing muscles, the curving of the shoulders, the impact of the feet on the racing earth. A wind from under the clay and the lime of the earth swept up to his hidden face. Only when the boughs of trees scraped on his back did he know that he was naked. So that he might not cry aloud, he shut his lips firmly together over a damp fold of flesh. Callaghan, too, was naked as a baby.

'Why are we naked?'

'Are we naked? We have our bones and our organs, our skin and our flesh. There is a ribbon of blood tied in your hair. Do not be frightened. You have a cloth of veins around your thighs.'

The world charged past them, the wind dropped to nothing. Peter heard the songs of birds, but no such songs as he had heard the birds, on his bedroom sill, fetch out of their throats. The birds were blind.

'Are they blind?' said Callaghan. 'They have worlds in their eyes. There is white and black in their whistling. Do not be frightened. There are bright eyes under the shells of their eggs.'

He came suddenly to a stop, Peter light as a feather in his arms, and set him gently down on a green globe of soil.

Below there was a valley journeying far away with its burden of lame trees and grass into a distance where the moon hung on a navelstring from the dark. From the woods on either side came the sharp cracks of guns and the pheasants falling like a rain. But soon the night was silent, softening the triggers of the fallen twigs that had snapped out under Callaghan's feet.

Peter, conscious of his sick heart, put a hand to his side but felt none of the protecting flesh. The tips of his fingers tingled around the pumping blood, but the veins were invisible. The ghost of Peter, wound invisibly about the ghost of the blood, stood on his globe and wondered at the corrupting night.

'What is this valley?' said Peter's voice.

'The Jarvis valley,' said Callaghan. Not a bone or a hair of him stood up in the steadily falling frost.

'This is no Jarvis valley.'

'Here is the naked valley.'

The moon, doubling and redoubling the strength of her beams, lit up the barks and the roots and the branches of the Jarvis trees, the busy lice in the wood, the shapes of the stones and the black ants travelling under them, the pebbles in the streams, the secret grass, the untiring deathworms under the blades. From their holes in the flanks of the hills came rats and weasels, hairs white in the moon, breeding and struggling as they rushed downwards to set their teeth in the cattle's throats. No sooner did the cattle fall sucked on to the earth and the dripping weasels raced away, than the flies rising from the dung of the fields, came up like a fog and settled on their sides. There from the utterly naked valley rose the smell of death, widening the mountainous nostrils on the face of the moon. Now the sheep fell and the flies were at them. The rats and the weasels, fighting over the flesh, dropped one by one with a wound for the sheep's fleas staring out of their hairs. It was to Peter but a little time before the dead, picked to the symmetrical bone, were huddled in under the soil by the wind that blew louder and

harder as the fat flies dropped to the grass. Now the worm and the deathbeetle under the fibres of the animal bones, worked at them brightly and minutely, and the weeds through the sockets and the flowers on the vanished breasts rose up with the colour of the dead life fresh on their leaves. And the blood that flowed, flowed over the ground, strengthening the blades of the grass, fulfilling the windplanted seeds in its course, into the mouth of the spring. Suddenly all the streams were red with blood, a score of winding veins all over the twenty fields, thick with their clotted pebbles.

Peter, in his ghost, cried out with joy. There was life in his nakedness, life in the naked valley. He saw the streams and the beating water, how the flowers shot out of the dead and the blades and roots were doubled in their power under the stride of the spilt blood.

And the streams stopped. Dust of the dead blew over the spring, and the mouth was choked. Dust lay over the waters like a dark ice. Light, that had been alleyed and moving, froze in the beams of the moon.

Life in this nakedness, mocked Callaghan at his side, and Peter knew that he was pointing, with the ghost of a finger, down on to the dead streams. But as he spoke, and the shape that Peter's heart had taken in the time of the tangible flesh was aware of the knocks of terror, a life burst out of the pebbles like the thousand lives, wrapped in a boy's body, out of the womb. The streams again went on their way, and the light of the moon, in a new splendour, shone on the valley and magnified the shadows of the valley, and pulled the moles and the badgers out of their winters into the deathless midnight season of the world.

'Light breaks over the hill,' said Callaghan, and lifted the invisible Peter in his arms. Dawn, indeed, was breaking over the Jarvis wilderness still naked in the descending moon.

As Callaghan raced along the rim of the hills and into the woods and over an exultant country where the trees raced with him, Peter cried out joyfully in his arms. There

was a shouting in the wind, a commotion under the surface of the earth. Now under the roots and now on the tops of the wild trees, he and his visitor were racing against the cock. Over and under the falling fences of the light they climbed and shouted.

'Listen to the cock,' cried Peter, and the sheets of the bed rolled up to his chin.

A man with a brush had drawn a red rib down the east. The ghost of a circle around the circle of the moon spun through a cloud. He passed his tongue over his lips that had miraculously clothed themselves with skin and flesh. In his mouth was a strange taste, as if last night, three hundred nights ago, he had squeezed the head of a poppy and drunk and slept. The cock cried again, and a bird whistled like a scythe through wheat.

Millicent, with a sweet, naked throat, stepped into the room.

'Millicent, Millicent,' he said, 'hold my hand, Millicent.'

She did not hear him, but stood over his bed and fixed his eyes with an unbreakable sorrow.

'Hold my hand,' he said.

And then: 'Why are you putting the sheet over my face?'

## *Footsteps*

BY EILEEN VERRINDER

(From *New Stories*)

UNTIL I was twenty I used to work in the longest seams of the mine, next to my father. As a little boy I had been proud when I first put on my overalls and went down in the cage with him and the other men, but I can never forget my great fear that I had become deaf when my ears first seemed suddenly blocked as we descended, and I heard everything as from behind closed doors. They laughed at me and told me that the feeling would soon pass away. That did indeed pass away, but the dread of deafness never left me, although now I would welcome it as a deliverance.

I could bear even to be deprived for long hours of the light, for the knowledge that I was earning my living was enough to make me endure cheerfully things far worse in the mine than darkness. At that time, with the spectacle every evening of my mother's endless suffering, money meant everything to me, and when I had finished my tea I used to attend a night school in the hope of some day qualifying myself for better work; I even hoped that I might become a teacher.

The explosion that killed my father was a small localized disaster in the seam where we worked. My father was the only one to die, though others were maimed, and very little fuss was made of the affair. The first great fall of the roof that crushed and buried him did not touch me, but as I looked up with my arm raised against the black avalanche, a pit prop fell across my face and a stream of fine coal dust poured over me. I fell choking and clutching at the ground. I remember feeling blood upon my neck. I remember nothing more.

I awoke to the smell of clean sheets and a sensation of coolness and peace; I knew that a long time ago, perhaps years, something had happened to me, and that now it was

over. I tried to call out, but I had forgotten how to make the sound of words, and uttered a meaningless cry, strange to my own sense. I could see nothing because of a bandage over my eyes, but I felt someone beside me and my groping hand met a woman's hand. That contact drew me like an anchor back into time and space, checked in the nebulous half-dream where I was drifting. I held tightly till I felt the pulse in her fingers. I thought my own hand grew and burned, and I had a vision of it swollen and gigantic on a thin wrist, grotesque as a household glove on my mother's emaciated arm. At the thought of my mother I realized abruptly my identity, the falling prop, the cold stream on my face, pouring, blow after blow; I could cry out the word that had stuck in my throat then, I screamed for my father. A voice bade me wait and not worry until I was stronger, the hand tried to give me comfort.

'He is dead,' I said, certain.

No voice but a hand on my head. I tried to lift the bandage, and swiftly two hands prevented me.

'You are in hospital, being looked after. They will all live. Don't worry. Only your father was too old to stand it.'

She left me, and I heard her footsteps, light and urgent, and in all the days that followed I heard them clearly through any other sounds, as I have heard them all my life since. With those footsteps came the news of my mother's fatal collapse; they were with me and around me when they took the bandage from my eyes and I was still hideously in darkness. I heard them for the last time on the station platform when after my convalescence I was sent to London to live with my aunt. For I was useless, blind.

My aunt was the wife of a window-cleaner, and lived in a block of flats newly built for the poorer people of Westminster. As my sister had taken service with a Quaker woman in Cheshire I had no other home than this.

It is strange to say that I did not regret my blindness. Against an unchangeable, accomplished fact it is useless to complain. Do the dead regret their deaths? I had died out



of one existence and been born into another on a different plane, where nothing except my own body was familiar to me, familiar as an old friend met unexpectedly after long absence, to be rediscovered, re-loved. My body tingled with a new sensitivity. As the months passed I gained a new power. Everything I touched I intimately knew. Knives, chairs, flowers, ornaments, paper, I understood for the first time as things of living texture. I could hold a cup until it seemed to breathe, flowers grew under my fingers, the surface of cloth was a character; I was plunged into a world that contained no inanimate thing, a world richer and more peopled than the old world of empty colour and form. Here I learned that those who have eyes do not know what it is to hear. I had looked into the faces of friends and been deceived; mouths can dissimulate, clothes can hide; but in that tenement flat I knew everyone and was duped by none. Their footsteps told me everything that they tried to conceal from each other, I knew their hearts better than they did themselves. I understood them without any passion to trouble me, quite clearly, as their God understands them and neither loves nor hates.

A child, Griselda, would come running from school. If the day had gone well with her she leapt from kerb to gutter, zig-zag all the way; or not so happy would walk unevenly balancing on the kerb edge; in tears, she crept by the walls of the houses, with a heavy clomp of heels across the glass tops of basement skylights; round the corner near home, always a change to the hop in the gutter to appear at ease before her father. I knew whose husband strode gladly out of doors and returned unwillingly, pausing in distaste before his door till the sound of a high-heeled shoe on the pavement grew faint and faded. I knew whose wife waited for the stealthy tread of stockinged feet in the passage after dark. I knew whose daughter went out each evening and never returned alone, seldom twice with the same person; only for a little while there was a young man who was with her constantly, firm and steady in his walk, but he angered her,

her feet were restless with irritation at his side, and one night she came home alone and I heard him no more. I was sorry, for I was certain by the sound of his lingering step as he left her, that he was in love.

Hardly a man or woman whose manner did not change when they turned the corner into the main street. Once there, they walked as they were, and from my chair on the narrow balcony, I listened to their real moods. Near home they changed into what they wished to appear. As a palmist reads in a man's left hand his true character and in his right what he tries to make of himself, so I could read them, main street and side street. I think they divined something strange in me, for the older folk avoided me, and the children in their chatter to me referred to things that I could not be supposed to know.

Even at its quietest my life was a rich medley of human clamour. I heard laughter, bitter or feigned, low-voiced quarrelling and the clash of a window swiftly closed, crying and blows, pain and the first wail of a child, tones of consolation and the mumbling of prayers, songs and imprecations, and the buzz of gossip. And above all, continually coming and going, those betraying footsteps, diffident or vigorous, speaking of irresolution or resolve. There was no step too muffled for my ears, no tripping or stamping jaunty enough to deceive me if it was a cloak for despair or treachery. In short I knew, before people approached me, just what was in their heart, and why they had come, and I amused myself by answering questions that they had not asked, making them recoil a little from me and tell each other that the blind youth was strange and not good to know.

A year and a half passed thus for me in the great human pandemonium, and as my hearing grew more acute, so did the world of so-called dead things disclose to me its secret pulse and rhythm. I received from everything a vibration and a response.

Being privileged thus to live two lives in one lifetime, I was too preoccupied to deplore my blindness, too absorbed

in this new awakening to claim any pity, and this increased the uneasiness of other people, for they saw that, far from needing their commiseration and tact, I was actually happy. They began to fear me.

One day a letter came from my sister, who had married her mistress's chauffeur, and had now a home of her own. In the flower of her happiness she remembered me and invited me to spend a few months with her. I feared to be a burden, but to please her and to avoid the fogs which corroded my lungs and throat, I went, in the company of one of my aunt's friends who happened to be travelling that way.

My sister Muriel when she saw me wept at the sight of the wreck that I was after so many months without exercise or sunlight. She talked of looking after me, and said many other things that I did not heed, for when the train left the station I stood still and listened until I could hear it no longer. It seemed suddenly as if, when it had gone, there would be nothing left to hear except Muriel's voice, anxious and loud. Nothing at all but her voice and our tread on the country road. I was terrified, as if the world had undergone some catastrophe, overwhelming all mankind but me alone. Throughout my first week in the country the terror grew. I was in solitary confinement in silence, my sister a tyrannous guardian. I became insane with fear and cried out that I must get away, back to my footsteps, but when I grew so wild she was frightened and left me alone to wander in her garden, kicking the path and the fence to make noise. One day I found the tall windows of her sitting-room and beat upon them with a stick till they rattled and sang. The silence was yielding! At last I knew how to conquer it. I grovelled for two stones to clench in my fist, and with all my force I crashed the window through. The sound of the splintering rang in my head, and with the triumph of it I laughed and laughed. My sister came running to me. God knows what I had expected from her, harsh words or blows, but there was no word. Then I remember falling on the

grass and whimpering like a fool, not because I was sorry, but because for the first time I wanted pity.

'Sit here, the sun is warm enough That's it You'll feel better in a minute Let me bathe your hands, you are dreadfully cut Why ever did you do it?'

'I must have something to hear,' I cried, still with tears. 'I *must* hear.'

'Listen to the birds,' she answered

Birds? In my panic I had forgotten the birds, never thought of the birds Birds used to sing in the gummy hawthorn hedge along the cinder track that led me home from the mine in the evening. At my sister's command the birds sang in my life again with the startling abruptness of a mechanical toy canary that twitters to a penny in a slot. They were everywhere that late afternoon, and I sat in the chair listening to them in a trance of happiness. I was no longer alone. I was encircled by a singing multitude, an orchestra of liquid notes that spurted and rippled like a river over me. My nerves quivered with the sting of my cuts, the iodine burned me to the bone. It was an ecstasy of music and pain that made me live more intensely than ever before, a revelation and a resurrection In the biblical phrase, the scales fell, but from my ears. In the following months I could listen to the breath of the earth herself and found out her secrets, not discoverable with eyes Face downwards in the grass I heard the insects creep along the blade and devour the luscious green flesh I heard small beetles and the stir of a snake in warm dead leaves. If a rabbit loped from his burrow, I knew; I could hear a fly struggle in a spider's web, a squirrel leap on a branch Pressing my ear against the trunk of a tree I heard the creatures that bore and probe, I clasped the tree and it stirred My fingers knew if a plant needed water, if a bud was breaking or a canker eating the flower I could find the snail on her slimy track on the nasturtium leaves, I waited for the rat to swim across the pond, I listened for the frog's leap. I was aware of all things, the very minutæ of sound, nature was voluble for

me. Away from the clangour of houses and streets, that is barren and evil, that I had heard from an indifferent height, unmoved, here I found in this plethora of tiny things the working of a rhythm and law that incorporated me, body and mind. I had been feared, outcast, and now I loved and was loved. In the garden and the woods the seconds were ticking that make the minutes and the hours until the final hour strikes, and I was drawn into this procession. The world flowed for the bulbs in garden rows, and for me. The birds chanted day and night.

In this great happiness I would gladly have died. I am torn from it and I still live.

Before she told me, her heavy step had told me that my sister was with child, and when the time of birth approached she said that I must go. Never to return again, of that I felt deadly certain. Back down that country road. A train in the distance coming nearer and shrieking into the station.

'Good-bye.'

'Good luck.'

That was the end. I am sitting now in the little narrow balcony, surrounded by my footsteps. Some have vanished, some are new. They are all charged with passion and personality. They are an agony for me to hear, full of hate and disorder. They buffet and tear me, they are aimless and hostile and destructive. They violate the earth's harmony which I won with such a gentle and healing conquest. I sit with my hands over my ears, praying to become deaf. For then the last good thing would be left to me, the divination, by touch, of the life of material things. I would have only my fingers to feel the pulse of existence, and until I died, that would suffice.

## *The White Line*

BY MALACHI WHITAKER

(From *New Stories*)

THE little girl stood at the door with her pink cotton nightdress done up in a brown paper parcel. She was hungry, ready to eat at an eating time, and sleep at a sleeping time, but nobody appeared to be expecting her.

Last Sunday, Lily had said, 'Oh, Phyllis must come up and meet our little Ivy. Can she come next week-end, and stay Saturday night? I'll bring her back here again on Sunday.'

Her mother had said 'Yes,' politely and rather drearily, and all week long, Phyllis had thought about little Ivy, magnifying her into a kind of angel. But by the week-end, everybody seemed to have forgotten. Saturday morning turned into afternoon. She ate her dinner and stood about, stiff and miserable, and of a sudden burst into tears and shouted in an anguished, accusing voice, 'They said I could go to see little Ivy for the week-end, and Lily would bring me back on Sunday.' She went on crying until she was nearly sick. All the directions were jumbled in her mind. She was to take two tramcars, and Lily would meet her at the corner of Wash Road at four o'clock.

It had all come right. She had had her face washed again, and Andrew had taken her to the first tram, full of troubled instructions.

'Now, Phyllis, be a good girl, because Lily is going to be your sister some day. I want you to let her see how nice you can be.' But there was a dark, worried shadow on his face.

Phyllis could feel that Andrew was not in the least happy. She knew when he was happy, though he was over twice her age. When he was playing cricket with the so-carefully-chosen team; looking tall and slim and nice in his flannels; talking to Lou or Carmen Isles, who loved him, Phyllis thought, almost as much as she did herself. When he was setting off for a long walk with Noel Sharpe, his shorts

flapping above his knees, the golden hairs on his calf gleaming. She could look up, then, and see his white, uneven teeth showing themselves in smiles, hear his shouts and laughter as Noel called some incomprehensible thing to him. But not since he had known Lily.

He was just walking along with his little sister, now, his steps slow, a frown between his brows, his eyes dull. He answered her absently, and she grieved in silence.

She didn't say 'I will be good.' It wasn't necessary. She had never been away alone before, even for a night, so of course she would have to be good. There was nothing else to do.

This was a funny door, flat to the street. It had a glass panel that said J. P. Elms, and underneath that, Painter and Decorator, in fancy letters—so fancy that it took her a long time to read them. She stood there so long, after her first knock, with the nightdress parcel clutched tightly and yet almost slipping from her arm, that she read them several times.

Then the door opened, and somebody came out dressed in street clothes, a little, plump grown-up with lovely red hair, dressed wide and waved under a wide hat.

'What do you want? Do get out of the way,' said the girl crossly. She had been crying, too, Phyllis saw, and her eyes were so puffed that they were almost closed.

'I've come to see little Ivy,' Phyllis said.

'Then go round to the back.'

She smoothed down her coat, looked about her defiantly, and went away down the street.

Phyllis had no idea where or what 'the back' was, but in the end, a little boy took her down a side-street, through a wooden gate, and left her near the open door of a scullery. Loud, angry noises were coming out of the house, and she could not help hearing Lily say in a voice so different from any she had ever heard before, 'She's a slut, a disgrace to the family, and I for one won't speak to her any more. Spoiling my chances, that's what she is, the dirty cat. I've

known for a long time what was going on, but I thought she'd enough sense to keep herself out of trouble.'

'Lily, Lily,' came a whining, trembling voice, 'be sure what you're talking about, be sure it's true. She hasn't said anything, you know.'

'Hasn't she? Anybody with half an eye can see it now,' Lily's voice shot back. 'A fine bridesmaid she'll make at my wedding, won't she, with her belly stuck out half a mile? There goes the bride, I don't think. Just wait till dad comes back, I'll tell him, and see what she has to say then. He'll belt her, and serve her right.'

'Don't tell dad, Lily,' went on the pleading voice. 'He'll half kill her. And we don't want any trouble or any hitch about your wedding. We'll all have to keep it dark till afterwards.'

'I will tell him, I will.' Lily's voice was loud and shrill. 'She must take what's coming to her. Why, only the other day she was making sheep's eyes at *my* Andy, and her like that. I'll teach her. People'll be saying it's his, if I'm not careful.'

'Do be kind, Lily. Glad's only eighteen, only a child yet.'

'Only a child,' Lily repeated, 'but she's old enough to make fools of every one of us. I've kept myself to myself for twenty-two years, and the first time I get a decent chance, she has to go and mess things up for me. Where's she gone now?' She paused, but there was no reply. 'And we're going to get to know who it is. Yes, I'll tell dad all right. I've said I won't speak to her again, and I won't, wild horses won't drag a word out of me. But dad'll make her tell, and if it's a married man— But that's her look out. She should have thought of that before.'

Phyllis knocked, and an uneasy silence fell. Nobody came for a few moments, then Lily appeared, smiling, one hand patting her hair.

'Oh, goodness gracious,' she said in an artificial voice, 'it's *Phyllis*, ma. Whatever made you come to the back door? Oh!' She slapped her brow with her hand. 'It's all my fault,



I'd forgotten I asked you to come and see little Ivy, didn't I? Come on in.'

She dragged the child through the scullery into a small, hot kitchen where a wizened, but not old, woman was sitting shelling peas.

Phyllis felt that she ought to say something, but no words would come to her. Lily went on, 'You don't mind, ma, do you? I asked Andrew's little sister to come and stay the night. She can sleep with Ivy. Is that your nightie, Phyl?' she asked playfully.

'Yes,' said the child. The wizened mother frowned and went on shelling peas. 'It's all the same to me, Lil, but you might have told me Ivy's bed's none so big, and with all this bother coming on us. . . '

'Well, I don't mind a bit of inconvenience, and I'll put off telling dad till to-morrow. But look here, I'm not sleeping with her any more. I'll sleep with Ivy to-night, and Phyllis can go with Glad. I don't mind a bit of inconvenience,' she said again.

Phyllis stood there awkwardly, feeling that she ought to be polite and say that she would go straight back home. But she could not. All the week long she had been living in dreams of this visit, and she could not bear to spoil it. She felt she could have listened for ever at the door to the strange Lily who was shouting about something and saying she would tell dad. And who was this Glad with whom she had to sleep? She had had visions of sleeping with little Ivy in an exquisite white bed. She wanted to love Ivy as she loved her brother Andrew and nobody else, not even mother and father. And she knew that Glad would be the plump and crying girl who had left by the front door as she came.

'Would you like to come upstairs?'

Lily stayed behind as Phyllis mounted the steep wooden stairs near the front door, and spoke in a rapid whisper to her mother. The child stood at the top of the stairs, holding her parcel and sniffing. The windows were closed, and everything smelt of new, strong varnish. At the bottom of the

steps, the fancy blue and pink letters of Painter and Decorator were wrong way round. There were three doors, all closed.

When Lily came up, she took her first into a large room at the front. It was carpeted all over, warm and close, and there were three mirrors and a very large, high bed.

'This is ma's and dad's room,' she said.

Phyllis was stunned. For a minute, she had thought that she was to sleep in this magnificent place. All her life she would remember that bedroom with its dozen pictures, its score of ornaments, little china boots and bowls on the mantel-piece, the glass things on the top of its dressing-table, its red and green and yellow carpet. Her own home seemed to her a very poor affair after this.

The second door belonged to little Ivy's room, which was a third-rate edition of the big room. It was packed with things, but was small and dark. The third door opened on to a flight of steps, which led to an attic.

'Here's my room,' said Lily gaily. 'Well, mine and Glad's, really. But you can sleep in this bed to-night. Put your parcel down.'

The little girl, still speechless, was looking at the clean walls and sloping ceiling. There was a patchwork cover on the bed, and she immediately loved it. And there was a picture above the mantel of the girl she had seen at the door, but in it, the girl was smiling and pleasant and pretty. She had a wider, kindlier face than Lily.

'Is this Glad?'

'Yes.' Lily's tone was short. 'Is this all you've brought? What about a Sunday frock?'

'This is my Sunday frock. I've got it on. I didn't think I'd need anything else.' She didn't want to explain to Lily that everybody at home had forgotten, just as everybody at this end had forgotten, too, the visit she had so much longed for.

'Where is little Ivy?'

'Oh, she's playing out somewhere,' said Lily carelessly. 'You can go and look for her. Only don't get lost.'

She wanted to tell Lily that she had never met little Ivy,

but by the time she had really thought of it, Lily had let her out by the front door

'She'll be about somewhere. Come in to your tea soon if you can't find her'

The afternoon was warm, but Phyllis had taken her coat off in Glad's attic. She had a dark green velvet frock with a swing pocket, and a straw hat with daisies and a maize-coloured ribbon on it. She stood for a long time twirling the string of her pocket round her finger, and letting it untwirl itself. There were some other children playing further up the road, so she drifted towards them and watched

Presently she caught a ball and threw it back to them, and shortly she had joined in the game, still without speaking. She played all the time without speaking, making cries in imitation of the others. It was quite pleasant

There was a small, rather ugly girl with thin hair dribbling down her back in tails, who kept putting her hand in her pocket and taking out a sweet and eating it without offering the bag to the others. Everyone called her Ivy, and Phyllis was afraid she was the Ivy she was looking for. This Ivy stopped a man to ask him the time, and then ran down the road, shouting 'It's tea-time,' to the others. Phyllis followed her, and ran round the street corner to the back door again.

Ivy turned indignantly, 'Hey, you can't come here. This is my house'

Phyllis stood stock still on the step, and would have stayed there all evening had not Lily come out and taken her by the hand. 'Now, you two, don't quarrel,' she said in the same sweet, artificial voice she had used before.

And soon they had all settled down, and were eating ham and salad, and drinking tea from cups with yellow flowers on.

Dad had come in. He was a big man who sat in shirt sleeves and sweated in the kitchen heat. Blue sweat stains on his blue shirt spread from armpit to elbow. He had a wide mouth and mutton-chop whiskers. Phyllis admired him, and thought how much better he suited the bedroom than little wizened ma.

He had a special couple of boiled eggs to himself. Phyllis could hardly eat for watching him. He was in a good humour, and talked to her. Lily and ma and Ivy watched him, too, but as if they were waiting to jump up and do things for him, rather than to enjoy him as she was doing. He had a round white mug with a coloured border. Lily refilled it three times for him. And he ate more than she had ever seen eaten at one time before.

After tea she went out again with Ivy and played until darkness fell. Then they went back to the empty house. She could hardly keep her eyes open, but Ivy had to stay up to wait for the others. Mrs. Elms had gone out long ago. Dad had taken himself off immediately after tea, and Lily had got ready soon after him to go to the theatre with Andrew.

She had let Phyllis watch her dress. Lily had done so much to herself. When her face was first washed, she looked even uglier than little Ivy, but by and by, things began to appear. She did so many things that Phyllis was fascinated. She made her skin, her lips, her eyebrows look different. She seemed to know each strand of hair, and to torture it into position. When she had finished, she was not at all like the shouting Lily of the kitchen.

Phyllis thought suddenly, 'This is the only Lily Andrew knows.' A lot of things seemed to grow clear to her, but she forgot them, playing snakes and ladders.

When it was very late, and she could hardly prop her eyelids open, Ivy said, 'Let's go and watch the pubs come out. I do it every Saturday night. Once a drunk fell in right through our front window. It's lovely watching them.'

So they went out and sat on the cool step. The night was very dark and glowing faintly with starlight. There was no moon. The air was fresher than in the kitchen, and Phyllis waked. She sat clasping her knees and looking up at the sky, thinking lovely things, remembering holidays on the sands when Andrew had played cricket with her and let her bat all the time; and when he had taken her into the sun-warmed sea and helped to teach her to swim, when they had walked

too far, and he had said, 'You're only a baby, yet,' and had picked her up and carried her along interminable roads until they were home again

'You haven't got much to say,' said Ivy disparagingly. 'I've even seen a drunken woman fall in the gutter, and you never laughed a bit I don't believe you're looking'

But Phyllis was drunken with sleep herself and could not see

'Look out, our Glad's coming.'

All that Phyllis recollected was the whole family walking in at once, with the exception of dad, and Glad saying to Lily, 'It might interest you to know that I'll be married before you are,' and of Lily turning to her mother and saying with contempt, 'She's a dirty liar And she needn't think I'll ever speak to her again,' and flouncing off to Ivy's room

Then the visitor was helped upstairs, each step feeling a mile away from the last. Kindly fingers helped her off with her clothes and helped her into the soft, patchwork-covered bed And soon she was sound asleep.

She awoke with the first dawn light. Sparrows were shouting 'chip, chip,' monotonously under the near eaves. The bed was moving softly because Glad was shaken with crying.

She lay blinking for a minute, and then remembered yesterday, and all the things she had heard in it. She put out a hand and touched Glad. 'Don't cry,' she whispered

Glad made no change; she only went on with her dreary sobbing.

'Please don't cry,' she whispered again. She did not know what else to say, so she slid her arm under Glad's neck, and leaned over and kissed the girl's hot, swollen face.

'Get off. Leave me alone,' said the girl fiercely.

She lay without moving, listening to the noise of the sparrows. Cold tears began to creep from under her own eyelids. 'I'm frightened,' she whimpered.

'Oh, shut up and go to sleep You go to sleep while you

can,' Glad said 'Soon enough you'll be sorry you were ever born.'

The child's fingers were caught in the girl's soft hair.

'You have got lovely hair,' she said reverently, stroking it 'Lovely, lovely hair'

'That's what he said,' Glad muttered, 'once' She broke into fresh sobs, 'Leave my hair alone Go to sleep'

'I can't. I want my mother.'

Glad opened her swollen eyelids 'Shut up Do you want to waken the whole house? All right, well come here then'

She put her arms gently round the child, and began to sing to her as if she were very small indeed

'Oh, hush thee, my baby, thy sire was a knight,  
Thy mother a lady, so gentle and bright.'

'That's nice,' said Phyllis gratefully, 'and you have got lovely hair You're good and Lily's wicked.' She went off to sleep again while Glad was singing

'And all this fair . . '

and did not wake again until Ivy came running over the floor and jumped on the patchwork quilt.

On the way downstairs, they peeped into Ivy's room to look at Lily. Her face looked small and mean on the pillow. Glad, with all her tears, had her own soft skin and hair, and it was nice to lie beside her. There was something wrong with Lily.

The child went home on Sunday afternoon. Lily had put her brown paper parcel into a leather bag, and was carrying it for her. Lily was dressed very neatly in a dark green costume. She had some cream lace on, and something cream-coloured interwoven in her hat. Her hair was pulled from its confining pins and tortured into a hundred curls Now and again her lips grew tight and straight as she thought of the coming interview with dad, of the bitter things she would say about Glad.

Andrew met them, but his little sister could not smile for him

'Have you had a good time?' he asked perfunctorily, looking all the time at Lily

'Yes, thank you,' she answered unheeded

'Well, run along, Phyllis, I'll look after Lily'

He put his arm about the girl, but she shook it off, coquettishly, 'Don't, Andy, you know I don't like to be touched.'

'Can I take your arm, then?'

'No, why should you?'

Phyllis took the leather case with the nightdress in it, and went with dragging steps to her own room. She looked at the muslin curtains blowing in the wind, at her white counterpane, at the doll she called Felice lying crookedly across the little white chair she had used as a baby. Her heart felt heavy.

During the afternoon, when Lily was talking to her mother, and Andrew was alone in the garden, she went out and stood beside him

'I don't like Lily.'

'Oh?' He looked at his sister moodily, then across to his mother, whose sleek head he could just see. Lily was standing there, too, and she smiled and blew him a pouting, inviting kiss, secretly. Her lips shaped the words 'Come on.'

'Andrew!' The little girl grabbed her brother's hand, 'Don't go to Lily, I don't like her. She's bad! She's bad!'

But Andrew merely pushed the child aside angrily, and she watched him walk across the lawn as though he were a bird, and a chalk line had been drawn between himself and Lily.

## *Marie and the Journeyman*

BY ERIC WALTER WHITE

(From *New Stories*)

MARIE first saw them on the quays one Sunday morning in Geneva

Oblivious to the brightly dressed throng that sauntered up and down, to the titbits of the young girls and the quizzing looks of the undersized young men with their doily lace handkerchiefs dangling from their breast pockets, completely oblivious to the wake of ill-concealed admiration and envy in which the crowd was involuntarily caught, walked two splendidly bronzed workmen carrying roly-poly canvas bags under their arms. It was not only their fine physique and the defiantly overhealthy look in their eyes that made the crowd gape and stare, but also the strange, tight-fitting clothes they wore, strained in places by over-muscular development. Their black felt hats with broad flapping brims looked like Mexican sombreros, their double-breasted jackets of black corduroy, cut low in the manner of an evening dress waistcoat, revealed collarless shirts, each with a narrow strip of red cloth running down the divide instead of a tie and kept in position by a kind of small brass masonic brooch. The trousers of the shorter workman were also of black corduroy with a red stripe running down the outward seam, those of the taller one were of white canvas with a double black stripe. Both pairs were cut so as to cling tightly to the knee and fall thence in bell-bottoms, which swung backwards and forwards like miniature hooped crinolines about their ankles as they walked. They both wore gold ear-rings, the shorter a pair, the taller only one, and in their gaping trouser-pockets, slit horizontally, not vertically, they carried butter-yellow folding rules.

Marie saw them and followed them up the quays. They walked in step—tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp—steps irregular enough to sound like iambs, like the ticking of the alarm



clock in her bedroom—tick tick, tick tick. They turned on to the stone jetty that ran out into the lake. Marie followed diffidently, losing distance. They sat down on the rough stone blocks at the end of the jetty and took off their boots. Marie ventured near enough to see that they wore no socks, only a length of dirty linen wound round about their feet and ankles like a bandage. She did not stay to see them wash their feet.

‘I wonder who they can be,’ she said to Lina next morning, as the two servants were making the beds.

‘I’ve seen them too,’ said Lina, smoothing out the sheets. ‘One evening when Raoul took me to see the crocodile woman at the fête. Who would you guess they are?’

‘Gypsies perhaps,’ said Marie.

‘What makes you think that?’

‘Their dark skin and the ear-rings in their ears.’

‘They’re not gypsies,’ said Lina. ‘I thought so myself at one time. Then I thought they might be Switzers in their old cantonal costume. That was Raoul’s suggestion. It was only when Blanche took up with one of them and started walking out with him that I discovered who they really were. She told me they’re not gypsies or Switzers, but journeymen, *Zimmerleute* from Hamburg, who come here to work as carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers and the like.’

‘Blanche? Which Blanche do you mean?’

‘The one that works at the pension. And Raoul tells me her journeyman is as tall as a door-post. Curious, isn’t it, with Blanche such a dumpy creature? Apparently he has a deep scar on his left cheek. Blanche is quite furious because he won’t tell her how he came by it—that’s to say, he tells her a different story every time she asks, and she can’t make up her mind which she wants to believe. Raoul also says that the journeyman has a much more interesting scar elsewhere; but I can’t believe that Blanche would have told him that.’

‘Blanche is a lucky girl,’ said Marie, lingering with the quilt and gazing out of the window at a little white cloud that was

slipping behind the roof of the house on the other side of the road.

'Oh! there's plenty of these Hamburger journeymen to be had,' said Lina. 'Raoul tells me there are over two hundred in the town, working on all these blocks of flats and the new hotel. If you want one, there's no reason why you shouldn't get one. They're amiable to women, though there's no money to be got out of them.'

'I should never dare,' murmured Marie, speeding the tail of the cloud behind a chimney. 'I'm too old to begin that now.'

'A woman's never too old—you take it from me,' said Lina with feeling. 'If you go to the Rue du Cendrier any Saturday night or Sunday, you will find them about in the street or in the cafés playing billiards. After all you're no older than I am.'

'I know that,' said Marie. 'But I am older in inexperience. You see, I've never had a man to walk out with—not properly—and I'm too shy to start now. It's a pity, I suppose, but I can't help it.'

'Well, we're all made as we are made, and that's different,' said Lina, gathering up her duster and brush. 'I suppose I shall have to start waxing the hall floor. How I hate Mondays! Don't you?'

'Yes,' said Maria absent-mindedly. 'I hate Mondays too.'

Next Sunday she finished work and came off duty late in the afternoon. She washed in the enamel basin in her bedroom, emptied the dirty water into the slop-pail, changed her dress, made her bed, wound up her alarm clock and set it to six Monday morning. Then she walked into town, ate a plate of macaroni and some fruit at a little Italian restaurant and went to the Cameo Cinema. It was full—that was to say, all the cheaper seats were full, and Marie was not prepared to pay more than 2 fr. 50 to see *2 Herzen in 3 Viertel Takt*, so she sat outside a café drinking beer for some time and watched the people go by. After that it was growing late, and she knew she ought to go straight home if

she was to get up fresh and lively at six o'clock the next morning. But she did not go straight home. She went to the Rue du Cendrier instead.

The Rue du Cendrier was a dark and narrow street in the quarter of St. Gervais. It has been built in the seventeenth century, and strange ornaments and forgotten coats-of-arms still decorated some of its windows and doorways. There were cafés on either side of the street, but it was impossible to see into them, as their blinds were drawn and strips of opaque paper were gummed along the edge of the plate-glass windows to seal up every chink. From some of them came the click of billiard balls, from others the strains of an accordion. A door opened, throwing a fan of light across the pavement, and a man lurched out almost on top of Marie. She shrank back into a doorway and watched him zig-zagging along the gutter. The fan of light on the pavement folded itself up, and the sound of the hot voices from the café died away as if shut up in a box.

At that moment Marie felt a touch on her arm. She turned round. One of the Hamburger journeymen was standing beside her. He too was carrying a roly-poly canvas bag under his arm, but he had no golden ear-rings, although his lobes were pierced.

'I've nowhere to sleep,' he said.

Finding she was silent, he went on. 'I've walked here from Vienna, before that I was in Budapest. I've been in Geneva three days and found no work. If I can get no work to-morrow, I shall go back to Zurich. Could you let me sleep in your room?'

Marie was aghast. 'Of course I couldn't,' she said. 'My mistress would never allow it.'

The journeyman looked at her closely with his clear straight eyes. Then he spat into the gutter. 'I thought you were a macadam,' he said.

'I don't know what a macadam is,' said Marie.

'A street-walker, a whore.'

'I'm only a servant,' said Marie.

'It's a pity,' said the journeyman 'If you had been a macadam, you could have taken me home to your room when you finished work. I could have slept on the floor, for I know how tired you sort get of always having a man in the bed. I would have been quite quiet and clean and left early in the morning. But, as it is, I suppose you can't take me.'

Marie was gazing at the words, RUDI STEINMETZ, KOTTBUS, painted in rude crimson letters on his roly-poly canvas bag. 'I'm sorry I can't,' she said, without looking up. 'Have you no money left to get a room for the night?'

'I pawned my ear-rings in Berne,' said the journeyman; 'but that money was only just enough to get me to Geneva. I found a cellar to sleep in my first night; but when I went back there yesterday, the door was locked and I couldn't get in. I haven't a centime left; so, you see, it isn't as if I were offering to pay you.'

'How much would a bedroom cost in this quarter?' asked Marie in a low voice.

'I can get a bed in the hostel at the corner for 1 franc 50.'

'And what will you do if you don't get the money?'

'Find some other macadam who will take me home with her without expecting me to pay. That's what I always did in Budapest.'

This decided Marie. Her fingers fumbled with the clasp of her purse. She couldn't distinguish the silver rightly for the crimson characters that still danced before her eyes. RUDI . . . RUDI . . .

'Please take this,' she said, thrusting some coins into his hand.

'I never asked for money,' said the journeyman, and Marie could feel his thick, rough fingers as he took the coins from her. 'What can I do for you in return? Will you come along with me to the hostel? There'll be no difficulty there.'

'No, no, no,' cried Marie. 'Please don't.' And she ran away from him breathlessly, blindly, down the street, past the lighted café windows, round a corner, under an archway, into the next street. There she stopped suddenly, leaning

against a wall, and her heart nearly failed her. What had she run away from? Would he follow her? How much had she given him? As she opened her purse, the lesser noises of the night began to return to her ears. low contented gurgles from the water flowing through the pipes and cisterns of the surrounding houses, a gear change as a Citroen went up the hill past Chantepoulet, and a curious grating sound made by the wind blowing a castaway newspaper over and over down the dry gritty gutter

She had given him two five-franc pieces

That night Marie had a dream.

She dreamed that she was alone in a dark narrow street, where there was no sound, no life, not even the stealthy padding of a nocturnal cat. And as she stood on the pavement, undecided, the day came. One after another the lamps failed, as if they had been touched with a wand, and when the last one went out, she looked up to the sky and saw that the dawn was already far advanced. Grey, lilac-grey, stretched the sky like an awning slung between the houses, lilac-grey, turning wanner and wanner as the silent clock in her side ticked away the small hours. Each change of tone was unfolded like a band, as if searchlights were plaiting a new system of daylighting to surprise the earth. And when the heavens had swaddled themselves up, there was no street left, but only an immense cocoon, criss-crossed with bandages like a bambino. The end of one of the bandages waved in the air, a swallow-tailed pennant. Marie waited her chance, and when the wind fell she jumped and caught it. Instantly the whole contraption collapsed. Alarm! She stepped back, astonished. She had unveiled a foot.

At that moment the journeyman began to wash his foot—naturally he was sitting at the end of the jetty by the lake—and other journeymen arrived and joined him. Hard by, a rowing boat floated on the lake—plop, plop, plop went the waves as they broke against its timbers, and the two oars trailed in the green water like fins. The little rowing boat

shook and bobbed as if it were holding its sides with laughter. Slowly, deliberately, rather terribly in his determination, the journeyman put out his naked foot and, using it as a boat-hook, drew in the rowing boat to the jetty. One after another the journeymen got into it, and when they had all sat down, the boat no longer shook and bobbed and laughed, but held itself quite still and low in the water. With a strong push the journeymen cast themselves off from the jetty and paddled out towards the middle of the lake, using their feet as oars and the oars as a rudder.

A high wind blew down from one of the mountain valleys and stung the lake like the lash of a whip. White sheep dotted the green lawn between the wooded banks, and in the centre of the flock the boatload of journeymen showed like a cluster of black toadstools. Slowly the boat began to settle, and as it sank, Marie caught fragments of a chorus sung by the unperturbed journeymen.

‘Und wenn das Geld versoffen ist,  
Dann komm und schlaf bei mir’

It was only when the sheep moved on and started quietly grazing over the spot where the boatload of journeymen had been that Marie realized that Rudi had drowned before her eyes. ‘O Rudi,’ she cried. ‘If you only knew! I wanted to—I wanted to say yes. But I didn’t dare.’

Too late! The dream was over, and she awoke in her empty bed. With inexplicable sadness she listened to the alarm clock ticking over the small hours on the shelf above. Not so small. It was already five o’clock. A milk lorry clanged by outside in the strange stillness of the new day; and then, far away, so far away that it might have been on the other side of the lake, a cock crew—once, twice. There was no need for her to get up before six o’clock, so she composed herself to sleep again; but she found that by no means could she re-enter her dream, and Rudi remained sunk deep in some inaccessible fastness of her subconscious.

being, buried beneath a green lawn where sheep were grazing.

She awoke to the trill of the alarm clock. It was Monday.

Marie went about her business in the house, making the beds, preparing the meals, Lina waxed the hall floor. Occasionally the two servants looked up from their work and gazed through the windows of the house at small little patches of the sky, or passing clouds, or slants of rain. And down in the town the Hamburger journeymen were working on the new hotel and the large block of service flats that was being run up at the side of the park. High up on the scaffolding they worked with plumb-lines and bricks and mortar, and occasionally one of them took a butter-yellow folding rule out of his gaping trouser pocket and laid it gently along the brick course. Midday came; they put away their tools, slung themselves into their corduroy jackets and hastened away in groups of two or three to eat. At the same moment Marie put on her freshly starched uniform and served the soup.

So Monday passed.

And Tuesday

And all the other days of the week

And by Saturday the journeymen had reached the attic story of the building; so they made haste to set up a wooden framework of beams to form the roof, and this they crowned with branches of freshly cut pine and garlands of flowers finely bedizened with ribbons and paper streamers. As the work of the bricklayers was now finished, the overseer paid them off, and the builder gave orders for a cask of beer to be broached in honour of the coronation of the house.

Marie avoided the quays when she went out that evening—too many people had been drowned in the lake—but the back streets brought her no respite, for they were thronged with workmen, and journeymen, whores (or macadams), shop-girls, and young bloods, all out for a spree; and whenever she saw a journeyman she must look him square in the face in case he might be Rudi.

The quarter of St Gervais seemed especially noisy. The cafés resounded like beehives as Marie passed. Someone was playing *Sous les Toits de Paris* on a broken piano. Suddenly there was a shout and the sound of broken glass. The music stopped, the door of a café burst open, and all its inmates swarmed out into the street. A woman was screaming. Her blouse was torn. Even as she screamed, a little worm of a man sneaked up from behind her and snatched a key out of her hand. 'Stop him,' shouted the woman. A young man in a soft hat laughed. The woman turned savagely on him and attempted to claw his face. 'Laugh, do you?' she panted, trying to escape from those who were holding her back. 'If it wasn't for you, I should never . . .' But she couldn't finish her sentence, for her slide slipped out and all her hair fell loosely about her eyes.

The man with the key had taken to his heels and disappeared down the street; the rest of the spectators were crowding round the harridan; the young man who had laughed stood alone in the middle of the roadway watching the scene. As he put his hand up to his forehead and tilted his hat on to the back of his head, Marie saw that he had very beautiful fair hair. 'Leave me alone,' shouted the woman, as she tried to tidy her hair. 'I'll do him in, the . . .' The boy with the fair hair laughed again, quite happily, almost nonchalantly. Obviously he was not afraid. A man with a moustache detached himself from the group round the woman, walked up to the boy as if he were going to ask him something and deliberately kicked him foully between the legs. The boy fell like a ninepin. His hat rolled off. He writhed in the gutter like a worm wounded by a spade. Someone shouted 'Flics!' and in an instant the street was empty but for the groaning boy and two of his friends who made haste to drag him off before the police appeared.

Marie would not have been surprised had she been sick in the gutter there and then. Feeling quite dazed, she wandered off in the direction of home; but as she came to the crossroads at Chantepoulet, something familiar struck her eyes and she



stopped dead on the kerb Outside the women's lavatory she saw Blanche talking to a journeyman, or, rather, the journeyman was talking to Blanche.

Marie came closer and looked the journeyman in the face. It was not Rudi Of course it was not Rudi—it was Blanche's journeyman, the one Lina had said was scared and as tall as a post. Marie looked again Sure enough, his cheek was as deeply scarred as a valley on a relief map. But what was the matter with Blanche? The journeyman was talking to her, and as he spoke, he bent his head a little, because Blanche was so short, and the ring in his ear bobbed and shook like a cherry But when he came to the end of what he had to say, Blanche answered never a word She just stood there, dumbly, shifting her weight from one leg to the other, her eyes fixed desperately on some point on the wall of the women's lavatory

Marie passed them by cautiously; and then, as she had not been noticed, she came back and passed them again, a little nearer.

This time she overheard the journeyman say, 'But you always knew that it would come to this I don't understand why . . .' A motor van drowned the rest; but when Marie turned round, Blanche's bright eyes were still busy, boring, gimleting their way through the same spot in the hard rough stone

Marie came and stood where they could not see her, but where she could overhear part of their conversation

'Surely you understand that now my work's finished I must leave Geneva? There's no reason why I should stay.'

'No, Karl.'

'I shall write to you from my next place.'

'That won't help'

'What more do you want? Haven't I given you six weeks of my life? That's more than any other woman's ever had.'

'I know. But that only makes it a hundred times more difficult to give you up'

'What shall I say? That I am grateful? That I am sorry?

That I am ready to throw up the guild before my term and marry you?"

'No No That's out of the question. I shall be quite all right if you leave me alone '

A pause.

'My train goes in twenty minutes. We've been over half an hour talking here. Are you cold?"

'A little '

'Shall we move on?"

'Where?"

'Towards the station.'

'As you like '

A pause. Marie was beginning to think they had gone, when all of a sudden she heard the journeyman's voice again.

'Do you think you are going to have a child?"

'No.'

'You're sure?"

'Quite sure now '

'Well, then, I don't see you have anything to worry about.'

'Nothing.'

Another pause

'Shall we be moving on?"

'I shan't go to the station, Karl '

'Why not?"

'I'd rather not go to the station, Karl Just leave me here, I'll be all right What is there left for us now, except to leave each other? And we can just as well do that here as in the station It will be easier for me, Karl, if you just go away. Leave me now. Go up to the station and join your comrades. You'll have time to drink with them before the train comes in '

'Well, if you really mean it . . . '

'Go, Karl, go . . . '

'Good-bye, little one.'

' . . . and don't forget that I loved you '

Blanche's voice was so low that Marie could hardly catch

the last words. For some time she heard the steps of the retreating journeyman. And then a long silence.

When she walked back round the corner, Blanche was still there, clutching her dowdy purse.

'So, he's left you,' said Marie.

'He's gone,' said Blanche

They walked on together in silence.

'Did you love him much?' asked Marie

'I love him too much,' said Blanche 'It's easier for him.'

They walked on together in silence

'Would you rather you had never met him?' asked Marie.

'No,' said Blanche. 'It was the happiest time of my life.'

'What will you do now?'

'I shall have to get used to sleeping alone again The thought of it kills me.'

'Is it as bad as that?'

'It's terrible'

Marie began, 'Do you know? Once I nearly . . .' But Blanche burst out crying. 'Don't mind me, Marie,' she said. 'But I can't help it. Listen Do you hear? That's his train. He's just left You can hear it clearly now. Oh! I wish I wasn't crying.'

Marie listened. A whistle blew. The noise of the train was quite clear in the night. The two girls had stopped under a street-lamp. Marie touched Blanche on the cheek.

'You'll never see him again,' she said.

Alone in her bedroom once more, Marie threw herself on the bed and thrust her head savagely into the pillow. She had come too close to the flame of life. her heart was singed.

'O God!' she sobbed. 'O God!'

Tick tick—tick tick, echoed the alarm clock And then, as if it repented of its insensibility, it changed gear unobtrusively in a kindly attempt to soothe the poor girl with a fatherly. tick—tick, tick—tick.

Rudi . . . Rudi. . . .

RUDI. . . .



THE BEST SHORT STORIES: 1935

*American*



## Outside Yuma

BY BENJAMIN APPEL

(From *New Stories*)

THE freight train stopped in blue sky. The steel tracks nailed down the desert. It smelled like a barn although there was no house to be seen. The steers in the cattle cars moored

Four hoboes stared from the caboose to the engine. At both ends heat was helling it down in torrents of bright yellow seeds out of a sun like a gleaming palm. In the hot waves, the shacks came running as if they were going to bump up like two locomotives. The shacks swung brake-handles, cursing.

'So long, sweethearts,' hollered the Georgian, jumping off. 'Next time I see you lice again, I'll be an oil man.' He was glad to be kicked off. That gave a fellow a chance to speak his mind

'You lying bum,' yelled a shack. 'You'll be a hobo till you croak'

The other hoboes grouped around the Georgian, tickled at his smart-aleck toughness. The Georgian sneered at them. 'The shack's right. It don't mean nothing for them to boot us off. And nothing for us to get off'

The train moved. Steers moaned, the sun ambering their brown eyes as the barn wheeled into cleanliness.

'There's more trains to get on,' said the kid, watching the freight rolling away.

'That's not the point,' said the Georgian. He felt glad to be a man again, free in the emptiness to walk his way with no bulls and shacks to boss him.

From the top of the freight, the desert'd been a sand fake to him, with slanty crooked hills a floor high. The sagebrush, mesquite, chappary cactus and such greenish brownish truck had seemed slopped in here and there as if on old-time stage scenery. That was because the desert had been saying

hello and good-bye all at once And that was how hoboos were built, he thought, hello and good-bye No use looking at them None of them had the guts to say boo They were shaking their heads carefully as if suspecting a fast one. They were hopeless, and he was one of them.

Even as he glanced about him, the desert insinuated itself into his mind. A shiver slashed across his shoulders like a sword How big the desert, how awful big He had an idea something in it might have a word to say to him But nobody'd want to speak to a hobo

They marched up to the tar road running parallel to the tracks. The tar colour was more friendly than sky and sun and sand. The road shouted to them, in the loneliness, of cities, Houston, St Louis, Los Angeles. The Georgian led the others who shuffled through the sand, the kid whistling, the Mex and Indian silent. The telegraph posts, tall and arduous as New Englanders, reminded them that men had passed this way. More and more, the Georgian was beginning to look his own strength in the face, the strength that had been cringing in box cars and jungles.

'We'll spread out down the road. No car'd give a lift to the bunch of us.' He pointed to his shadow. 'See that. That's me I'm nothing I'm not a man, nothing but a dirty filthy bum afraid of his shadow'

The kid had run away to be a cucus man; now whimpering, bumming them all for a butt 'What's eating you, Georgia? Gimme a butt I got to get to California— What'll we do? Where's a freight? You sound like a teacher to be preaching and all, Georgia.' He gasped after his long bubbling speech, wincing as the Georgian socked his fist into his thin back. 'Ouch. Lemme alone'

'Get a lift, you punk.' He hated the kid's aspect of cleanliness. How did the punk manage it? Dirt was all over him like another skin. His neck was rough, scratchy, and only a month ago he'd been neat, and owner of six ties

They lay on their bellies in the sands, out of sight of any possible motorists. The kid squatted at the Georgian's heels,



who had separated himself from the caste of the other hoboes by a foot. The greasy Mex was near the Indian, his felt hat dented like a cowboy's. What am I highfalutin for? thought the Georgian. I'm like them, hollow inside, dumb, licked by the world. But they were worse, never talking, stupid as the cactus.

'It looks like a long wait and it ain't for this I lost my job and left home.' The highway crawled along loneliness. He stood up, irritated his strength didn't mean anything, chucking pebbles at the desert.

'If I had my gun we could bang some lizards. I got a gun. You bet. I'm a fine shot.' The Indian hadn't forgotten the Reservation school, careful about his words as if he were confronting his teacher. His black eyes held no further thought of the past than this. When he was silent he owned neither past or future.

The Georgian laughed wildly. 'You're a regular Monte Blue. If you didn't own a gun, you'd never talk. God, I'm glad you got a gun even if it made the steers so sick they hollered. That's how the shacks guessed about us.'

'Gila monsters worth plenty dough in town,' said the Indian gravely. 'That's right, Diego, huh?'

The Mex grinned. 'Si. Si. You betcha.'

'He talks,' exclaimed the Georgian. 'I was thinking I was alone. That's what we want, Monte; Gilas, dough. I'm sick panhandling.'

The Mex scratched his brown nose. 'His name—Jacinto.' His eyes were quick, his hearing like a dog's, but he'd heard nothing but the supposed error. 'Jacinto. Si.'

The Indian declared Monte wasn't his name. The Mex grinned as if maybe some ancestor was a diplomat. In their company his heart seemed to fill with sand from the desert and he ached with a hot self-pity.

They climbed mounds topped by blackish-grey lizards like reptile feudal barons in armour, and the sun shone. The Georgian heaved his spangling knife but the lizards were fast as sunlight, peopling the desert, four-inch ones, grand

footers He picked up his knife, laughing, his knife ahead of his laughter

The Indian reproved him What did he want with lizards? Lizards weren't worth a damn He was so practical, his red-brown face so nicely calm it seemed as if he were a shopkeeper behind a counter Gilas were something else.

More than ever, the Georgian was positive they were dead. He'd better get to his brother in Texas or he'd be dead, too The Mex trudging behind Monte-Jacinto was grinning like a circus, his sleek cheeks round as if he were blowing a horn. All dead and playing at life That was the trouble with hoboos The sky was an immense blue wall on the horizon. Between themselves and the forbidden parapets the desert hilled and wandered and no joyous things but moonstones. In his misery, hunting for their cool eyes was fun. Every time he pocketed one he felt he had stolen from the desert, proved himself a man. And the Mex and Jacinto duplicated his theft like shadows

'What'd you wanna leave me?' roared the kid, charging down a ridge, his voice dynamite. His small peaked face with the scolding mouth was unreal. 'I got sick waiting Gee whiz. That wasn't fair leaving me. Who's got a cig? Hey, Georgia, that was a dirty trick'

'Any cars pass? Shut up. If you don't stop bellyaching I'll paste your fishlips to your ears.' He glanced wearily from the skyblue wall to the land where the kid'd come from. The line of telegraph posts compassed their haven even if the road was out of sight 'You dumb kid, you might've got lost' He pitied the dumb goof. Nobody had room for him except maybe the desert

'Aw, I heard you yelling' His inquisitive eyes fastened on the Georgian's closed fist, and when he saw the stones his joy was deafening to hear. 'Oh, boy! They're nice! Gimme some o' them stones What you call them? They worth much?'

He dropped one in the greedy palm. 'Find your own. A man's got to do things for himself. No one's going to help

you, kid ' He thought of his neckties, the money he'd spent on girls. Again he turned to the horizon but what it held was only a promise

'How do you find them? Tell a feller, gee whiz.'

The Indian guided them up and down the rises. How in hell he'd catch a Gila even if he saw one was beyond anything.

.. But it was fun playing like kids, to curse the flickering lizards Jack rabbits were grey disappearances. And always the hope there'd be something behind the next hill, if only a skull. The desert. Yes, the desert if that was anything.

The wind whistled up as if the sands were finally getting sick of the Gila hunters The sky was yellow-darkish on the edges.

The kid wiped his nose. 'Gee whiz Let's go. Who's got a butt?'

The telegraph posts, suddenly, had been hewn behind them. The hills thronged between the horizons like a herd of buffalo, the wind ruffling their sand hides The Mex paled, the kid began to bawl. The Indian reassured them as if he were Buffalo Bill's right-hand man. He'd lead them out. He went backward from their forward progress but were they going back?

Indians were only fit for the movies, thought the Georgian The strength that had first greeted him when chased off the train, like another self, a brother long separated, embraced him now The kid and the two dead hoboos were on his hands. His first responsibility in weeks Praying, he ran up a tall hill. Christ, they were in luck. There were the telegraph posts or rather their cross-rails lying on top the sand ridges He hollered directions, cursing the kid for snuffling. They packed together against the desert. Nothing but moonstones, moaned the kid He wanted to go home.

'Shut up You ain't got a home None of you.' He mounted hill after hill to recheck their steering. So that was what the desert had to say to him The wind was speaking Death and hard luck and fight for you, Georgia, and never a damn thing else But with that strength come to him, he

wasn't afraid. It wasn't so bad fighting when one was young, the odds weren't so bad

Finally the telegraph posts were seen from the hollows, taller, getting taller and taller

They surrounded a post as if it were a fire The tar road was partly covered by swifter highways of sand. The kid still was crying The sky was yellow-dark, the sun a dim candle glowing at world's end.

Mica particles got in the Georgian's mouth 'Shut up.' In the shroudings of sand, the older hoboes were silent but that damn kid'd talk if he were dying. The poor kid He was right, that kid What the hell had they roamed into the desert for? Moonstones His life struck him as useless Off the train and into the desert, the dry whore, and no one to care or to forbid him Almighty God, no one to care. He ached to be loved, to have kids, a wife, friends, people to love him That was how to get even with life. Not to live unknown, dying like a rat He had a vision of a stone plunging into water, leaving the ripples of its passing What had that to do with him? Fool, fool, oh you fool, Georgia. You came near to dying for nothing at all in the damn desert

The kid shouted he was going to Texas with him. Georgia's brother'd give him a job. Georgia had to take him. His eyes blinked, furtive and trustful at the same time.

The Georgian growled bitterly 'You. An oil man. Hell!' But the strength in him like the bottom man of an acrobatic team was glad to be lifting up another

The highway wanted to steal away from their need, to go wild from its purpose Cars shot past but there were no lifts. The desert wind sang. They tied handkerchiefs around their nostrils, scraping one foot along the road to feel the smooth tar, the kid hanging on to the Georgian's belt with a drowning man's fist. The Mex tailed Jacinto The strong hoboes led the weaklings, and behind them all the desert tip-toed after like a huge mocking ghost.

The sun was more yellow than dark. The wind howling

against the sun's dying glow but not to blow it out, rather as if trying to fan the day alive. It became lighter. The dirt road into Mexico was an invitation. Two miles down it and they saw houses, trees, more faithful than roads, chanting of settlement. Algodones. They went into the town out of a western movie. Twenty saloons. A river with a gold-dredging barge on it. The Georgian laughed. 'Here we are, boys. The oasis looks good.'

Americans, Mexicans, and the oasis women were drinking, having fun. He ordered two whiskies and pushed one to the Indian. 'I'll stand treat to you. You're dead on your feet but a good guy when you're not talking about guns and finding ways out of the desert. You got guts for a dead man.'

The Mex stated Jacinto was not dead man.

The kid fidgeted at the women, whining for him to save a drop.

'I'll save you hell.' He dropped some moonstones on the bar. 'Your pay, cap.' As the bartender growled, he took off his shoe, flipped out a silver dollar. 'Those stones are my pay. Glad to get rid of the cartwheel, it blistered me plenty. Boys, hey, Jacinto, kid, Mexico, can you beat it? Moonstones ain't legal tender.'

'If we had a Gila,' said the Indian, looking as if he'd never been near a desert.

The Georgian roared, drunk on one shot. The funny thing was that the yellowbelly Mex, the snotty kid, also appeared as if they'd never been lost. It was all in the day's work. They were dead, sure enough, even if they'd made believe they'd been scared to die. But he was alive. He gritted his teeth tight as if to keep that strength from escaping, thinking of Texas among the drinking phantoms. Texas, I'm bound for Texas.

## *The Overcoat*

BY SALLY BENSON

(From *The American Mercury*)

IT had been noisy and crowded at the Milligans' and Mrs Bishop had eaten too many little sandwiches and too many iced cakes, so that now, out in the street, the air felt good to her, even if it was damp and cold. At the entrance of the apartment house, she took out her change purse and looked through it and found that by counting the pennies, too, she had just eighty-seven cents, which wasn't enough for a taxi from Tenth Street to Seventy-Third. It was horrid never having enough money in your purse, she thought. Playing bridge, when she lost, she often had to give I O U's and it was faintly embarrassing, although she always managed to make them good. She resented Lila Hardy who could say, 'Can anyone change a ten?' and who could take ten dollars from her small, smart bag while the other women scurried about for change.

She decided it was too late to take a bus and that she might as well walk over to the subway, although the air down there would probably make her head ache. It was drizzling a little and the sidewalks were wet. And as she stood on the corner waiting for the traffic lights to change, she felt horribly sorry for herself. She remembered as a young girl, she had always assumed she would have lots of money when she was older. She had planned what to do with it—what clothes to buy and what upholstery she would have in her car.

Of course, everybody nowadays talked poor and that was some comfort. But it was one thing to have lost your money and quite another never to have had any. It was absurd, though, to go around with less than a dollar in your purse. Suppose something happened? She was a little vague as to what might happen, but the idea fed her resentment.

Everything for the house, like food and things, she charged. Years ago, Robert had worked out some sort of budget for her but it had been impossible to keep their expenses under the right headings, so they had long ago abandoned it. And yet Robert always seemed to have money. That is, when she came to him for five or ten dollars, he managed to give it to her. Men were like that, she thought. They managed to keep money in their pockets but they had no idea you ever needed any. Well, one thing was sure, she would insist on having an allowance. Then she would at least know where she stood. When she decided this, she began to walk more briskly and everything seemed simpler.

The air in the subway was worse than usual and she stood on the local side waiting for a train. People who took the expresses seemed to push so and she felt tired and wanted to sit down. When the train came, she took a seat near the door and, although inwardly she was seething with rebellion, her face took on the vacuous look of other faces in the subway. At Eighteenth Street, a great many people got on and she found her vision blocked by a man who had come in and was hanging to the strap in front of her. He was tall and thin and his overcoat which hung loosely on him and swayed with the motion of the train smelled unpleasantly of damp wool. The buttons of the overcoat were of imitation leather and the button directly in front of Mrs. Bishop's eyes evidently had come off and been sewed back on again with black thread, which didn't match the coat at all.

It was what is known as a swagger coat but there was nothing very swagger about it now. The sleeve that she could see was almost threadbare around the cuff and a small shred from the lining hung down over the man's hand. She found herself looking intently at his hand. It was long and pallid and not too clean. The nails were very short as though they had been bitten and there was a discoloured callous on his second finger where he probably held his pencil. Mrs. Bishop, who prided herself on her powers of observation, put him in the white collar class. He most

likely, she thought, was the father of a large family and had a hard time sending them all through school. He undoubtedly never spent money on himself. That would account for the shabbiness of his overcoat. And he was probably horribly afraid of losing his job. His house was always noisy and smelled of cooking. Mrs. Bishop couldn't decide whether to make his wife a fat slattern or to have her an invalid. Either would be quite consistent.

She grew warm with sympathy for the man. Every now and then he gave a slight cough, and that increased her interest and her sadness. It was a soft, pleasant sadness and made her feel resigned to life. She decided that she would smile at him when she got off. It would be the sort of smile that couldn't help but make him feel better, as it would be very obvious that she understood and was sorry.

But by the time the train reached Seventy-Second Street, the smell of wet wool, the closeness of the air and the confusion of her own worries had made her feelings less poignant, so that her smile, when she gave it, lacked something. The man looked away embarrassed.

## II

Her apartment was too hot and the smell of broiling chops sickened her after the enormous tea she had eaten. She could see Maude, her maid, setting the table in the dining-room for dinner. Mrs. Bishop had bought smart little uniforms for her, but there was nothing smart about Maude and the uniforms never looked right.

Robert was lying on the living-room couch, the evening newspaper over his face to shield his eyes. He had changed his shoes, and the grey felt slippers he wore were too short for him and showed the imprint of his toes, and looked depressing. Years ago, when they were first married, he used to dress for dinner sometimes. He would shake up a cocktail for her and things were quite gay and almost the way she had imagined they would be. Mrs. Bishop didn't believe in letting yourself go and it seemed to her that



Robert let himself go out of sheer perversity. She hated him as he lay there, resignation in every line of his body. She envied Lila Hardy her husband who drank but who, at least, was somebody. And she felt like tearing the newspaper from his face because her anger and disgust were more than she could bear.

For a minute she stood in the doorway trying to control herself and then she walked over to a window and opened it roughly. 'Goodness,' she said. 'Can't we ever have any air in here?'

Robert gave a slight start and sat up. 'Hello, Mollie,' he said. 'You home?'

'Yes, I'm home,' she answered. 'I came home in the subway.'

Her voice was reproachful. She sat down in the chair facing him and spoke more quietly so that Maude couldn't hear what she was saying. 'Really, Robert,' she said, 'it was dreadful. I came out from the tea in all that drizzle and couldn't even take a taxi home. I had just exactly eighty-seven cents. Just eighty-seven cents!'

'Say,' he said. 'That's a shame. Here.' He reached in his pocket and took out a small roll of crumpled bills. 'Here,' he repeated. And handed her one. She saw that it was five dollars.

Mrs. Bishop shook her head. 'No, Robert,' she told him. 'That isn't the point. The point is that I've really got to have some sort of allowance. It isn't fair to me. I never have any money! Never! It's got so it's positively embarrassing!'

Mr. Bishop fingered the five-dollar bill thoughtfully. 'I see,' he said. 'You want an allowance. What's the matter? Don't I give you money every time you ask for it?'

'Well, yes,' Mrs. Bishop admitted. 'But it isn't like my own. An allowance would be more like my own.'

'Now, Mollie,' he reasoned. 'If you had an allowance, it would probably be gone by the tenth of the month.'

'Don't treat me like a child,' she said. 'I just won't be humiliated any more.'

Mr. Bishop sat turning the five-dollar bill over and over in his hand. 'About how much do you think you should have?' he asked.

'Fifty dollars a month,' she told him. And her voice was harsh and strained. 'That's the very least I can get along on. Why, Lila Hardy would laugh at fifty dollars a month.'

'Fifty dollars a month,' Mr. Bishop repeated. He coughed a little, nervously, and ran his fingers through his hair. 'I've had a lot of things to attend to this month. But, well, maybe if you would be willing to wait until the first of next month, I might manage.'

'Oh, next month will be perfectly all right,' she said, feeling it wiser not to press her victory. 'But don't forget all about it. Because I shan't.'

As she walked toward the closet to put away her wraps, she caught sight of Robert's overcoat on the chair near the door. He had tossed it carelessly across the back of the chair as he came in. One sleeve was hanging down and the vibration of her feet on the floor had made it swing gently back and forth. She saw that the cuff was badly worn and a bit of the lining showed. It looked dreadfully like the sleeve of the overcoat she had seen in the subway. And, suddenly, looking at it, she had a horrible sinking feeling, as though she were falling in a dream.

## *The Party next Door*

BY ERNEST BRACE

(From *Story*)

‘OH, Anthony, I wish you wouldn’t let yourself get all worked up over something that can’t be helped.’

Anthony Corder gave no indication of having even heard his wife’s thin, vaguely quavering voice. He held on to the steering-wheel as masterfully as if he were guiding a plough through a stony field, and stared straight ahead down Maple Avenue.

‘If there was something you could do about it,’ May went on, timidly stubborn, ‘why—’

‘I’d do it, of course,’ Anthony stated. ‘And it’s precisely because there isn’t anything I can do that I’m “worked up,” as you call it.’

May sighed, shook her head, and closed her thin, weary mouth. As far as deference to Anthony’s authority was concerned, she was just another pupil in one of his classes in Greek and Roman history. She, too, stared directly ahead down the avenue.

‘Stucco!’ she breathed, as they came in sight of the pinkish walls of a starkly new house on the left.

‘An Italian villa,’ Anthony muttered, seeing the green tiled roof. He thrust his foot against the clutch, and the car coasted slowly past the raw, grassless terrace. A man in linen knickers and gay sweater stood on the veranda. Both Anthony and May stared at him.

Abruptly Anthony jerked the steering-wheel, and the car swerved into the driveway of the modest, clapboard cottage adjacent to the new house. Grim-lipped and silent, Anthony braked the car to a sudden stop and climbed out. Paying no more attention to May than if she were one of the pieces of luggage piled high in the back seat, he strode around to the kitchen door and unlocked it. Methodically he went from room to room, raising the shades and glancing at each

piece of furniture, to make sure that nothing had been disturbed during the three months they had been away. Then he went back to the car and began unloading the boxes and bundles and suit-cases. When he had distributed these in the various rooms where May would unpack them, he went upstairs to the bedroom, took off his suit, hung it neatly away in the closet, and put on a pair of overalls. May was in the kitchen when he came downstairs.

'Oh, Anthony,' she said, dropping her hands wearily, 'why do you bother to clean the car now? You must be tired after—'

Anthony went out the kitchen door and drove the car to the garage behind the house. There he connected the hose, gathered together a bucket, soap, sponge, and cloths and set to work. The black, high-bodied sedan was six years old, but when he had finished with it, the surface shone like patent leather.

He put away his cleaning gear and locked the garage. As he marched up the path toward the kitchen door, it seemed unlikely that any thought, any indecision could check the progress of his stocky, broad-shouldered body, but half-way, he suddenly stopped and turned to stare through a gap in the row of lilac bushes that divided his land from the plot on which the new house had been built. And slowly his boldly rigid features relaxed into an expression that even May had rarely seen. The heavy line of his bushy eyebrows became puckered almost wistfully, and his tight lips drooped.

Ever since Anthony had first bought a quarter acre of land and built his home in Beech Knoll, he had planned some day to buy the adjacent strip. Now it was irrevocably lost. He had waited too long—over fifteen years now. It didn't seem possible it was that long. There hadn't seemed any hurry. When he had first come, all the land surrounding his had belonged to a single large estate. A few years ago the estate had been sold, and then, soon after, it had been sold again, this time to a development company. He was

spending his savings on a summer abroad when that had happened. He had returned to find his rural home surrounded by building lots and himself without sufficient capital to preserve his seclusion. He had planned to build a small greenhouse where the Italian villa now stood. He had been planning that for years. And now it was too late. Strangers had blatantly settled themselves on his property. It was his and had been for years—morally. 'The world is too much with us, late and soon' he thought. He hated the world, the modern world. He might go somewhere else, build a new home. Cutterson, the real estate agent, had come to him two years ago with an offer, and again this spring. He could get twice what he had put into it. But to sell his home, the flower beds he had cultivated so many years, that row of lilacs he had planted, the silver birches through which spring flowed up to screen his bedroom window every year . . . The line of his eyebrows straightened out, his mouth closed, he marched on to the house.

'Have you seen *her*?' May asked, as they sat at the kitchen table, eating supper.

'No.'

'I caught a glimpse of her out the window while I was shelling peas. She's rather pretty, in a way. She's dark and slim.'

'He's pretty, too,' Anthony said. He thought of the man's glossy blond hair, neatly parted in the middle. He knew the kind of boy the man must have been. He knew that such boys always failed in Ancient History, and that they were brazenly unashamed of their failures.

'I wish you'd try not to be so prejudiced, Anthony. I know it's hard but, after all, they're our neighbours. For all we know, they might turn out to be real nice people.'

'Why do you say that, when you know as well as I do that they won't? I don't like their house, their looks, or anything about them. And what's more, we're not going to have anything to do with them.'

May became a silently obedient pupil. Her pale, slate-

coloured eyes fluttered over the objects on the table. She sighed and nervously brushed back her greying hair. She nibbled tentatively at her food, and at length her harried eyes settled upon Anthony. She waited, like a schoolgirl with her hand in the air, until he looked up at her.

'I suppose they'll think it's funny we don't call on them, since they're newcomers.'

'They'll think we don't want to be friendly with them, I hope, for that is precisely the truth.'

'Oh, dear, I do dread living so close to neighbours we aren't on speaking terms with. It makes everything so unpleasant.'

Anthony did not reply.

'You don't suppose, do you, that the man Mr Cutterson told us about who wanted to buy would still be interested?'

Anthony frowned angrily. 'If you think I'm going to sell my home and run away, you're very much mistaken.'

Again there was silence. This time it was broken by the prolonged honk of an automobile horn. Anthony tilted back in his chair so that he could look out the window. A large yellow convertible coupé was drawing up in front of the stucco house. The front and rumble seats were filled with people who shouted and waved as the man in linen knickers ambled down the path toward them. They climbed out and followed him back into the house. Anthony could hear their voices, and now and again he could hear what they said, for the windows of both houses were open.

'... and we're all set to warm up your house for you, Al. ... Where's George? ... This is a swell place, all right; I'll bet it's got a bathroom and everything ... Where's Nancy? ... Oh, let's have one now. ...'

Anthony turned back to the table and grimly resumed eating.

'I guess they must be going to have some kind of a party or house-warming to-night,' May said.

Anthony did not even glance up.

'But it won't be so bad in a few weeks now. We'll have to

keep the windows closed as soon as it gets a little cooler, and then we won't hear them.'

'We'd hear people like that if we were stone deaf.'

Later, Anthony went into his little study off the living-room and tried to fix his attention on a volume of Grote, but his emotions were too deeply stirred by evidences of paganism near by. He heard another car drive up, and another. He heard the sharp voices of gay, excited people. Like children after school has been let out, he thought. Finally he heard dance music. Theoretically, he did not disapprove of dancing, but practically he despised people who danced. And he loathed radios and phonographs. He laid aside his book and gave his attention completely to bitter resentment. He felt as if strangers had invaded his living-room and for some inexplicable reason he lacked authority to order them out. If only he had not chanced to return the day of their rowdy house-warming! The house itself and the people who had built it were bad enough, but a derisive home-coming like this was unendurable. He switched off his desk-lamp and stood up. He walked to the open window.

There seemed to be a light in every room in the house. On the veranda people were dancing. In the kitchen three men and a woman were talking and drinking together.

'... Al! Oh, Al! Where's Al... What do you want?'

Anthony saw the blond-haired man in the gay sweater enter the kitchen.

'Oh, Al, where's my wife? ... How would I know where your wife is? I haven't had her ... always lose my wife when I go to a party, Al. As soon as I get inside the door I lose my wife ... don't know why it is but just as soon ... what a party's for, Henry, otherwise you might just as well stay home ... love my wife ... fallen down the cellar stairs or something like that and was lying there. ...'

They all shouted as if they were trying to throw their voices above the roar of a waterfall.

Anthony clenched his teeth and turned away from the

window He went into the living-room at the other side of the house, where May sat darning stockings He dropped into the Morris chair and stared into the black fireplace May glanced up at him and turned quickly away She knew that this was the time for unobtrusive silence, that Anthony would vent his wrath upon anyone or anything that presented itself to his attention From time to time, she stole quick glances at him

Sounds of the party penetrated indistinctly into the living-room, and Anthony unwillingly strained to identify them. Music, voices, laughter were blended into noise Anthony's flat hands tightened upon the arms of his chair, and the muscles of his jaw were tense. He could stand it no longer He jumped up and strode back into the study and to the open window that looked out upon the party

' . and cut out the acrobatics, George, you're here to warm up the house, not to wreck it . not there, Al I tell you something must have happened to her Damn it, Al, I . . . '

Anthony had read of parties like this, but he had never before been this close to one. Only two couples were dancing now Anthony watched them, oblivious for the moment to the voices and the shouting. His innocence exaggerated the languor and sensuousness of their movements on the dimly lit porch. Anthony's fingers dug at the window-sill These people were defying him, making fun of him They were thumbing their noses at his own painstaking, serious life. Bacchanalia The Romans had celebrated this feast to Bacchus every three years. How many times he had offered the dusty fact to his pupils, to be returned to him later neatly wrapped in examination papers He had read that there were orgies like this nowadays, but he had never known anything about it He had used the word Bacchanalia as a closely fitting cover to this Pandora's box of actuality. Couldn't they see how vile they were? He ought to tell them. They were like an unruly class needing the discipline of his stern voice. And there was nothing he could do.



Nothing. He could have been no more horrified if the sewers of the community had overflowed and made an island of his home. A disaster like that could be remedied. His home. His greenhouse. It was incredible.

As a figure stumbled out the back door and began to move erratically in the grey darkness between the two houses, Anthony's morosely thoughtful eyes frowned into sharp focus. The man was almost too drunk to stand up. His legs hurried frantically to support the headlong movements of his body, like the steps of a man trying to balance a long pole on his nose. Without warning, his course straightened out, and he came stumbling directly toward the window of Anthony's study. Anthony moved swiftly through the kitchen and out the back door. At least he could keep the drunken fools clear of his own grounds.

'Get out of here!'

The man stopped and swayed like a young tree in the wind.

'Get out of here, I tell you! Get off my property!'

's all right. Don't get yourself all worked up like that. The way you talk about property, you'd think I was a communist or something. What I'm looking for's my wife. You haven't seen a wife around here anywhere, have you? A medium-sized wife with—'

'You drunken sot!' Anthony stepped up to the man and seized him by the shoulders. The man struggled, but Anthony had no difficulty in thrusting him back through the gap in the lilac bushes. 'Now you stay the other side of that line, or I'll know the reason why.'

'Line? I don't see any line. But if I did, I'd pick it up and wrap it around your damn neck for you. I don't like—'

'Henry!'

Anthony looked up and saw a woman come hurrying across the strip of graded dirt between the lilac bushes and the new house.

'Henry, what are you doing out here?' She came up behind the swaying man and grasped his arm. She glanced

nervously at Anthony 'I—I hope he hasn't made a nuisance of himself, Mr. Corder,' she said

Anthony stared silently at her Since she knew his name, he concluded that she was the mistress of the stucco house He saw that she was young and slight Her voice sounded frailly childish He wanted to denounce the party, which seemed to him a Bacchanalian rout, but faced with her youthful hesitancy he could find no words. Beside the neat, rigid pattern of his living, his conception of what he would call 'debauchery' had taken on the exaggerations of a caricature Mrs Down was a striking incongruity.

'Come on, Henry'

'Lemme alone I came out here to find my wife, and if this guy thinks he's gonna hand me a line, when—Jees, that's good Hand me a line Didja hear that one, Nancy? I tell you that's good. Leggo my arm! Damn it, leggo my arm! I tell you, I—'

With abrupt decision, Anthony turned and stalked back to the house. As he had watched Mrs. Down tug at the arm of the drunken man he had been suddenly afraid of himself. He had wanted almost irresistibly to take this Henry into his own broad hands and shake and choke him to a realization of his swinish bestiality. A little woman like that. . . . His hands clenched.

He went into the living-room May evidently had not heard him go out, for she still sat darning stockings. He felt a spasm of bitterness toward her She was so meek, so vaguely self-effacing. Her thin, whitish cheeks hung down in little pouches at the corners of her mouth. He remembered that they always felt strangely cool under his perfunctory kisses.

'It's after eleven,' he announced brusquely. 'I'm going to bed'

'I'm afraid you won't get much sleep, Anthony'

'We'll see about that.'

Anthony looked at his watch just before he turned out the light and climbed into bed. Twenty minutes to twelve. He

would give them until midnight. The noise of the party rose and fell. Here in bed he could not distinguish words, nor see them dancing. But his imagination had been deeply stirred, and he tossed restlessly with its vivid flashes. How revolting that such a slender, delicate little woman should have to take care of a drunken man. He would like to strike these people with his bare fists. A high-pitched laugh rose sharply above the babble of the party and was cut off as suddenly as if it had been strangled. How helpless she had seemed, a bewildered child encircled by savage dogs. She moved pitifully, silently through the orgiastic scenes of his melodramatic thoughts.

Anthony switched on the light and drew his watch out from beneath the pillow. Two minutes past twelve. He climbed out of bed and stepped into his slippers. He looked much older in his long, white nightgown. His tousled grey hair seemed whiter.

'Anthony! What are you going to do?' May was sitting up, wide-eyed.

He did not answer. He did not even look at her, instinctively avoiding the temptation to expend the force of his wrath upon her. She had no convictions, no force of character. Her only weapon was a fretful whine. He walked to the window.

Everyone at the party seemed to be gathered in the living-room. They were all standing around in a circle, watching something with deep interest, punctuated from time to time by laughter or cheers.

*'Keep quiet!'*

Anthony's booming voice swept the noises of the party into silence.

*'There are people around here who want to sleep.'*

The circle broke up, and they all crowded to the windows.

'There he is,' someone shouted. 'Up there.'

Anthony stood, resting his palms on the cool window-sill, leaning out.

'But what about the people who don't want to sleep? . . .

Shh! . . . There's no point to making him mad. . . . It's the guy who was belly-aching about his damn line . . . Come on over and join the party . . . Come on over to our house and play . . . My mamma says for you to . . . Shut up! . . . Just don't pay any attention to him . . . We've got a right to have a party if we want to . . .

*'I warn you once more to keep quiet!'*

'Thank you, sir And kindly go to hell, sir . . . Did you say he was a school teacher, Al? . . . Please, teacher, can I leave the room? Will it be all right if we bring you over a nice, big, red apple? . . . A nice, big, red raspberry. . . '

Anthony withdrew from the window. The noises that had followed the word 'raspberry' were not to be answered by remonstrance. He went downstairs and into his study. He snapped on the light and picked up the local telephone directory. In a bitterly calm voice he gave the number.

'Hello, is this the police station? . . . This is Anthony Corder of 453 Maple Avenue speaking . . . The people next door to me—Down, I believe the name is—are drunk and disorderly and are disturbing the peace. They have a gang of drunken, screaming people there, and one of them I have had to eject from my property by force. . . . Naturally I warned them, but they merely screech personal insults at me. . . . I most certainly do want you to take action . . . The fact that they are my neighbours is exactly what makes it imperative . . . Yes, I wish to make a definite, formal complaint against them . . . I trust you will Good-bye.'

Anthony switched off the light and walked to the window of his study. There were still a few figures at the windows opposite, but the circle had formed once more. He could see now that a girl was dancing alone. Brief glimpses showed him her head moving in time to the music. He could not be certain, but he believed that it was Mrs. Down dancing. His lips tightened. He stood motionless in the window until he heard a car coming down the street. He leaned out to see it draw up before the stucco house. Two policemen descended and marched up the path to the front

door. Anthony heard the bell ring, and again silence came abruptly. Anthony tapped the window-sill with his knuckles and smiled.

'Run you in, but we'll have to if you don't keep quiet . . . disturbing the peace and trespassing . . . All right, all right, I'm just telling you, that's all . . . Better follow this guy's suggestion and go to his house to finish the party. . . I know, I know.'

People began moving about the house and talking excitedly but not loudly. After a time, the lights upstairs went out. The policemen got into their car and drove off. Pretty soon the other cars began to fill. The downstairs lights went out and the front door slammed.

'I hope you never wake up!' someone shouted.

As he went upstairs, Anthony heard the cars starting, and by the time he had climbed back into bed, they had roared off into silence.

But the silence seemed somehow strange and raucous. The triumph he had expected to savour was a brief, tasteless morsel. The pinkish house with its green tiled roof still awaited the morning light to defy him flamboyantly. The man in the gay sweater and with neatly parted hair would return to it, and so would his wife, who, now, probably, was moving her lithe body to excite drunken men. Beside him May snored rhythmically. If he shook her, she would wake up and whine—better let her snore. Anthony was still awake hours later when a car drove into the garage next door.

During the week that followed before the opening of school, Anthony came to realize that he had won only an unimportant skirmish in the long, wearisome war that lay ahead. There were no more parties; indeed, the new house seemed menacingly silent. An occasional glimpse of the man or his wife proved they were still living there, and at night lights shone in the windows, but the shouting and the laughter were no more. At times Anthony felt that they were plotting against him, that the silence enveloped whispers that would unexpectedly burst into defiant shouts. He came to wonder

whether he did not prefer the noises of the party. Now he could not fight, he could not denounce them—only pause, while he worked in his garden, and remember the greenhouse he had planned. From time to time he thought of Cutterson and the offers he had brought. But he would not run away. He could not.

Returning home after the opening day of school, Anthony settled himself with a deep sigh in the corner of a vacant seat on the four-fifteen. He felt tired and jerky. New classes always tangled up his nerves. He hoped no one would take the seat beside him. He needed room in which to stretch out and relax. He spread his hat and brief-case on the seat, and leaned his head wearily back against the green plush cushion. He closed his eyes, then opened them a moment later and frowned, annoyed that the train did not start. He closed them again, just in time, for someone had stopped beside his seat. If he pretended to be asleep, the passenger would probably move on to another place.

‘Pardon me’

Anthony’s eyes snapped open wide at the sound of a woman’s voice. As he saw her, they opened even wider. His lips parted, too, and then with a quick scramble, he grabbed his hat and brief-case, piled them on his knees, and drew himself farther into the corner. He felt her sitting down beside him, but he glared steadfastly at the nape of neck ahead.

He might be mistaken, but he knew that he was not. Except that one night a week ago, he had seen her only at a distance. Did she know who he was? She must. Ahead, there were half a dozen seats entirely vacant. Her thin eyebrows had been raised superciliously, defiantly, while she had waited for him to clear the seat. But why? Why? He glanced stealthily at her. Her chin was tilted up, and her small, fragile face was pale with rigid resolution. He looked away and moistened his lips. He knew that she was defying him, that her deliberate choice of this seat was a manoeuvre in the long war that lay ahead.

With a jerk, Anthony grabbed his hat and brief-case and stood up. He pushed by her rudely, bumping against her knees, and fled up the aisle to one of the vacant seats. And then, as he sat down, he regretted giving way to his impulse. He had run away, almost as if he were afraid of her. He could still feel the spots where her knees had touched his legs. What was the matter with him? What had happened to him? It was not like him to do things like that. He rubbed his leg where her knee had brushed it. She must be *brazen* to deliberately seek him out. If he had stayed there he might have babbled out some explanation. It was just as well he had run away, shown her his scorn. He might step in to see Cutterson on his way up from the station. No, no, he must put that thought out of his mind for good. He must get hold of himself again. It was nothing but his nerves. He would not look back. He rubbed his leg again.

At Beech Knoll he hurried off the train as if he were trying to escape pursuit. He stalked down the street. He would not look back, he would *not*. He would not even notice the pink house. But as he turned in at his own gate, he glanced quickly down the street. She was not in sight. He climbed the porch steps slowly and a little wearily.

'You look tired, Anthony.'

'Do I?' He frowned and went into his study, as usual.

But he did not, as usual, hurry from there up to the bathroom to wash his hands. He slumped down in the leather chair and sat staring at the polished, dustless surface of his desk. That first day at school got worse every year. She hadn't seemed drunk when she led that disgusting swine back to the house. Perhaps she didn't drink. Perhaps she was ashamed of the whole affair and had sought him out on the train with the intention of apologizing. But the expression on her face. He had stumbled against her knees like a frightened schoolboy. If it weren't for the house, it would be easy enough to forget her. He got up and went to the window. Why in God's name hadn't he had sense enough to buy that land three years ago, instead of taking the trip

abroad? What was the matter with him, what *was* the matter? If only . . . if only . . . if only . . . He started. A woman turned in at the stucco house, the woman who had sat beside him. He watched her open the door and step inside. He turned from the window and sat down again, heavily.

Not since the party had May mentioned the house next door to Anthony, but that night, as they were getting ready for bed, she was driven, against her better judgment, to puncture the growing bubble of his tense silence.

'Oh, Anthony, I do wish you wouldn't brood so over that new house. There's nothing you can do about it now.'

Anthony sat on the edge of a chair, untying his shoes. He looked up at May and seemed almost surprised to see her. She was combing her hair before the mirror on the mahogany dresser, and her back was toward him. She looked thin and tired and ancient in her long white nightgown. He hated her weariness, her withered body. She had no more character than the faded wallpaper. He had never wanted this meekness of her. He hated her quavering voice. He despised her. Suddenly he wanted, almost overwhelmingly, to beat her, to slap her thin, humble face, until she should turn on him screaming and fighting and clawing. But she would only lie on the floor whimpering, grovelling. God, what was the matter with him? His hatred dissolved into fear. As she turned to look at him, he bent down and went on untying his shoes.

'If there was anything you could do about it,' she began. 'I wouldn't—'

'But there's nothing, and if you had any sense at all, you'd know it's precisely that that makes me brood.'

She sighed. The thin clarity of his words held a warning she dared not ignore. She finished combing her hair and climbed into bed. She lay hunched up, motionless, watching Anthony's methodical undressing. When at last he stood ponderous and grim in his nightgown there were tears in her eyes.



Anthony opened the window and switched off the light. May waited to feel the bed sag under his weight; instead she heard his voice

'You go to sleep,' he said. 'I'm going downstairs for a while'

Anthony went to his study. He drew up a chair before the window and sat down in the darkness. His thoughts were like a basket of writhing snakes. They had never been like that before. But even the most venomous snakes could be mastered if one grasped them firmly, resolutely, without fear. His hands clenched. The night throbbed with a strident cricket pulse. He was lost in the darkness. He was alone, terribly alone. Only with hatred could he steel himself to march into the future. Perhaps he was going mad.

A movement in the single lighted window opposite drew his attention. It was an upstairs window and it was open. A woman leaned out and rested her arms on the sill. She looked up at the sky. Her arms were bare, and she was clad only in a nightgown. She looked to Anthony mistily unreal.

He breathed quickly. Fantastic impulses leaped into his thoughts, scattering them. He wanted to let her know that he saw her, that he pitied her, that he wanted to protect her, that he understood—what? His hands trembled. He must call out. He would turn on the light so that she might know he was watching. And then she moved slowly away from the window. He saw her cross the room. The light went out.

Anthony stared long at the oblong of darkness where the light had been. He shivered. He felt uneasy and apprehensive. He was a school teacher, a married man, fond of his home and his garden. No, he did not know what he was. He did not want to find out. Where did these impulses come from that seized him so swiftly and left him trembling? He had never sown the seed. The furrows of his thought had always been as neat and well tended as his garden. Was he going mad? Perhaps she had known all the time that he was watching her. Perhaps she was the kind of woman who would show herself deliberately. What was her purpose?

And what was his? It was not she who frightened him. It was himself. Somehow he must escape this terrible imminence of inconceivable disaster. May was upstairs crying. He didn't want to hate her so much. He tried not to. He really tried. He must be mad. He shivered again and hurried upstairs to bed.

It was a Tuesday afternoon that Mrs. Down had sat beside him on the train. On Wednesday, as he boarded the four-fifteen, he looked for her timidly and felt that he was relieved when the train started without her appearing in the car. But on Thursday he leaned out of the window and scanned the passengers anxiously as they boarded the train, and on Friday, he walked the full length of the train in search of her. 'I can't stand this much longer,' he murmured to himself as he returned to his seat. But he did not know what it was that he could not stand. 'I'm a fool, an old fool,' he muttered. 'Why should I want to explain anything to her? What is there to explain? But I've got to do something—something—anything.'

He plodded slowly up the street toward his home, being careful not even to glance at the window of Cutterson's agency. His heavy body sagged. He was conscious that it sagged. He wished that he were older, much older. And then he wished that he were younger. His mind had come to resemble that party, noisy, debauched, incoherent. If only he could cry out and end the turmoil. Perhaps the silence would be worse, as it had been after the party.

He got into his study without meeting May. He had a feeling that if he didn't have to see her for a while, things would straighten themselves out. He sat down and rested his head on his hands. He ought to weed the chrysanthemum bed this afternoon, but he wanted to stay here alone, where no one could see him, where he need not pretend that the form of his living was the same. Perhaps if he made no attempt to keep these bastard thoughts from rioting through his mind, they would wear themselves out. His body stiffened as he heard a hesitant knock on his study door.

'Yes.'

'Can I come in a minute, Anthony?'

He gritted his teeth and sat up 'Yes'

May stepped just inside the door and stood wiping her hands on her apron.

'I thought I ought to tell you, Anthony I—well, you see, Mrs. Down came over here this morning.'

Anthony cleared his throat 'Well?' He looked at his hands. They trembled slightly and they were very cold

'She really seemed quite nice, Anthony. Of course, she wasn't very friendly and—and naturally I wasn't either, but—'

Anthony could picture the scene vividly. He knew May was lying when she had added that she wasn't friendly, either. May was always friendly with everyone, apologetically so. He hated her again, terribly.

'Well, what she came over for was to say she hoped we wouldn't call the police every time they had a few friends in. It seems they're expecting some people to-night, and—' May's voice faded into silence.

Anthony sat staring at his hands.

'It's a lot cooler to-day,' May began again, uncertainly, 'and maybe if we kept the windows closed and you sat in the living-room—just for to-night—maybe we wouldn't hear them.' May hesitated, took a step toward the door, hesitated again, and then backed out of the room.

Anthony stood up and squared his shoulders. He felt like a soldier who has cowered through the night in a trench, awaiting the signal to advance, the signal which will transform the terrible energy of his fear into physical action. Grim-lipped, he went upstairs, put on his overalls, and went out to weed the chrysanthemums.

Throughout supper, he sat tense, listening, but no cars stopped at the house next door. Evidently this party was to begin later. After he had finished his last cup of tea, he stood up and, not even seeing May's fearfully protesting gaze, went into his study. He sat down and picked up the

volume of Grote. But his mind was too busy picturing the coming triumph to concentrate on the dead past.

At a quarter to nine a car drove up, and he heard people getting out and going into the house. At nine two more cars arrived. Anthony watched them unload. There was a flurry of noise and then the front door shut it in. By listening intently he could hear faint noises. He could see people in the kitchen, but the kitchen windows were closed. Cautiously he opened the study window. The noises were a little louder, but still faint and far-off. The night was quite chilly. He closed the window again and sat down at his desk.

They had beaten him. They were laughing at him. There was nothing he could do. No drunken men would wander out into the space between the two houses to-night. They would keep the windows shut tightly. They would stay on the other side of the house. The woman might dance again. Men would lose track of their wives. Things would happen, things that he could only imagine, *must* imagine while he sat here impotently hating them. He was locked out of a classroom of rebellious pupils. He knew the taunts they would utter. He hated the woman now. At least that was better than wondering, dreaming. Perhaps he was getting hold of himself again. But the house would always be there, containing life that mocked his life. He was beaten. It had been inevitable that he should be. He could see her moving lithely. He could see the eyes of the men watching her thighs. He *must* hate her. One must hate the evil of life. But there was no triumph unless one could denounce, revile, raise one's firm hands in open defiance. It was horrible just to sit and gnaw at the bone of one's wrath. The snakes were alive again, writhing, coiling. Their slimy bodies eluded him.

He got up once more and went to the window. He could see them moving about. He saw a group in the kitchen drinking. It was as if the sound mechanism of a talking picture had broken down. He turned away, snapped off the light, and went into the living-room.

May was sewing a button on a pair of his underdrawers. She looked up at him over her spectacles and bit off her thread.

'I can't hear anything in here,' she said.

Anthony stood with his back to her staring down into the black fireplace.

'They seem to be trying not to bother us. Maybe we'll find they aren't so bad after all. As I said, she seems to be a real pleasant little woman. Of course she was only here a few minutes and—'

'Long enough for you to grovel in front of her!'

'Anthony!'

'Don't say "Anthony!" in that shocked way. I've seen you do it. You'd grovel in front of the vilest whore living if she smiled at you.'

May took off her glasses. Her face was dusty grey. Her mouth quivered. Anthony had never spoken to her like this before. She got up to leave the room.

Anthony turned. 'If you had any character at all, you'd hate these people as I do. You'd despise them. You'd spit at them if they ever crossed this threshold.' Anthony blinked. His eyes felt hot and strangely large, but they saw only vague blurs.

'I would rather grovel than hate as you do, Anthony.'

He had not expected her to reply. He had expected to see her pass, ghostlike, out of the room. She did not move. She stood there in front of him, something maddeningly close, something less blurred than the broken mist in which she stood. And then she was gone.

He blinked again. He could see more clearly now. There was something lying there on the floor. He had heard a cry. His hand tingled. He sat down, and put his hands over his face.

When he looked again, May was still lying there on the floor. A little bright comma of blood from her nostril down over her lip. He wanted to pick her up, to make sure she was not badly hurt, but he was afraid of her now. He dared

not touch her. He had never struck her before. The evil from the house next door was a slow contagion. He was sick with it. The silence of the room was stretched taut with his fear.

May moved. She raised herself on one arm and reached for her handkerchief. She did not look at Anthony.

He ought to tell her he was sorry, try to explain. Somehow, he ought to be able to explain it. She must understand, after all these years, that it would take something outside himself, some illness, to make him do such a thing. At least he could say he was sorry. He would tell her now that he was sorry.

'I've decided to go down and see Cutterson in the morning,' he said.

May was getting up. She was crying now.

'We could find a place somewhere else with more land.'

May hurried to the door. Anthony heard her climbing the stairs. She was sobbing loudly now. In a few minutes he would go upstairs and tell her he was sorry. It wouldn't be running away, really. It would be a triumph of scorn. They would know then how he despised them.

## *The Cold Winter*

BY ERSKINE CALDWELL

(From *Story*)

AFTER I had been in town a week, I began going early in the evening to the room I had rented, to lie awake under the warmth of the blanket. Out on the streets when night had come, it was always cold. There was usually a chill wet wind from the river, and from the bare uplands the February winter descended hour after hour, freezing and raw. Even men with overcoats hurried through the icy streets, with lowered heads fighting the cold, towards heated homes.

It was cold in the unheated room I had rented, but the warmth of the blanket was like the clinging arms of a girl in distress.

By the third night of that week I had accustomed myself to the unheated house. At first I could not sleep. But on that evening I took off my shoes as soon as I had reached the room and got into bed immediately. For the next five or six hours I lay awake, warm under the blanket while frost on the roof across the way formed slowly in fragile designs of cold beauty.

Out in the hall I could hear people passing quickly from room to room, hurrying through the cold corridor while the contracted boards of the floor creaked under their shoes. After a while I became conscious of warmth flowing through the cracks in the wall. A young woman and her small daughter lived in the room next to mine, on the right, and the heat they had was escaping into my room. I could smell the scorched air and the burned gas of their small stove. I lay awake then, listening to the movements in the next room, while their slowly formed picture was melted into my memory. Toward midnight I fell asleep, remembering only that in the next room the young woman moved lightly when she walked and that the small girl spoke to her mother softly and lovingly.

After that night I began to come home much earlier in the evening to cover myself with the warmth of the blanket and to lie awake in the darkness listening to all that happened in the next-door room. The young woman prepared supper for the girl and herself, and then they sat at the small table by the window and ate slowly, laughing and talking. The little girl was about eight, and her mother was almost as young as she when they talked and laughed.

The cold of the unheated room was not so hard to bear as it had been before I came to know them.

I knew by the end of that second week how each of them looked even though I had never seen either of them. Through the thin plaster wall I could hear everything they said and did, and I followed the motions of their hands and the expressions on their faces from second to second, hour after hour. The young woman was not working, either; she remained in the room most of the day, going out only in the morning for half an hour to walk with the girl to school, and again in the afternoon to walk home with her. The rest of the day she sat in the room, by the window, looking out over the red-painted tin roof across the way, and waiting for mid-afternoon to come so she could walk to the school for her daughter.

There were other people in the house, many of them. The three floors of the building were rented, room by room, to men and women who came and went at all hours. Some of them worked during the day, some at night, and many had no jobs at all. But even though there were many people in the house, no one ever came to my door, and no one ever went to the young woman's door next to mine. Sometimes there would be the sound of a man walking heavily, coming hurriedly down the hall, and the young woman would jump from her chair by the window and run frantically to the door, leaning against it with her fingers on the key and listening to the sound of the man's stride. After he had passed, she went slowly back to her chair and sat down once more to look out over the red-painted tin roof across the way.



Later in February it became colder and colder, but I was warm when I lay under the blanket and listened to the sounds that came through the thin plaster wall.

It was not until I had become aware of her running to the door each time the sound of a man's footsteps rang through the rooms that I realized something was about to happen. I did not know what the happening was to be, nor when, but each morning before leaving my room I waited and listened for several minutes to hear if she was standing by the door or sitting in her chair. When I came back in the evening, I pressed my ear against the cold wall to listen again.

That evening, after I had listened for nearly half an hour, I knew something was about to happen, and for the first time in my life I had the desire to be the father of a child. I did not stop to turn on the light, but got into bed, without even taking off my shoes. I lay tensely awake upon the bed for a long time listening to the movements on the other side of the wall. The young woman was quick and nervous, and her face was white and drawn. The little girl was put to bed as soon as they had finished eating supper, and without a word, the young woman went to her chair to sit and wait. She sat silently, not even rocking, for a long time. I had raised my head from the pillow, and my neck was stiff and cold after the strain of holding my head horizontally without support.

The desire to be a father to the child left no concern for the mother. The young woman could not be the mother until I was the father, and I realized only then that I could not take one without the other.

It was eleven o'clock before I heard another sound in the room next to mine. During the three hours that I had lain awake on the bed waiting, she had not moved from her chair. But at eleven o'clock she got up and drank a glass of water and covered the girl with another blanket. When she had finished, she moved her chair to the door and sat down. She sat and waited. Before another half-hour had passed, a man came down the hall, walking heavily on the contracted

boards of the floor. We both heard him coming, and we both jumped to our feet. I ran to the wall and pressed my ear against the cold white plaster and waited. The young woman leaned against the door, her fingers gripped around the key, and listened with held-in breath. The little girl was sound asleep in bed.

After I had been standing for several minutes I felt the cold of the unheated room wither my hands and feet. Under the warmth of the blanket I had forgotten how cold it was, and the blood had raced through me while I waited stiff and tense, and listened to the sounds in the building. But standing in the unheated room, with my face and ear pressed against the cold white plaster, I was shaking as though with a chill.

The man came to the door next to mine and stopped. I could hear the woman's trembling, and the breathing that jerked her body, and each moment I expected to hear her scream.

He knocked on the door once, and waited. She did not open it. He turned the knob and shook it. She pressed with all her strength against the door and held the key in its place with fingers of steel.

'I know you are in there, Eloise,' he said slowly; 'open the door and let me in.'

She made no reply. I could hear through the thin wall the strain of her body against the frail door.

'I'm coming in,' he said.

He had barely finished before there was a sudden thrust of his shoulder against the door that burst the lock and threw him inside. Even then there was no sound from her lips. She ran to the bed and threw herself upon it, hugging desperately in her arms the girl who had slept so soundly. I, who would be the father, shivered and listened.

'I didn't come here to argue with you,' the man said. 'I came here to put an end to this mess. Get up off the bed.'

It was then for the first time that evening that I heard the sound of the young woman's voice. She had sprung to her

feet and was facing him. I, who would be the father, pressed my face and ear against the cold white plaster and waited

'She's as much mine as she is yours. You cannot take her away from me'

'You took her away from me, didn't you? Well, it's my turn now. I'm her father'

'Henry!' she begged 'Henry, please don't!'

'Shut up,' he said

He strode to the bed and lifted the girl in his arms

'I'll kill you if you take her out of this room,' she said slowly 'I men that, Henry'

He walked with the girl to the door and stopped. He was not excited, and his breath was not even audible through the thin wall. But the woman was frantic, she was the mother. I, who would be the father, was helpless; my hands and feet were numbed with the cold and I could not move the muscles of my lips. The young woman had not begun to cry, but through the plaster wall I could hear her breathe and I could feel the quick movements of her body.

He turned around.

'You'll do what?' he asked.

'I'll kill you, Henry!'

There was a moment's silence, complete and still. He stood at the door, the girl lying in his arms waking slowly from sleep, and waited. Each second seemed as though it were of an hour's duration.

'No, you won't do that,' he said after that. 'I'm going to beat you to it, Eloise.'

Through the thin plaster wall I could hear the smooth slide of his hand into his coat pocket and out again, I could hear the sound of a woman's breath and the gasp in her throat. Through the thin plaster wall I could see everything that was to happen.

When he pointed the pistol at her, she screamed. He waited until she had cried out, and then he pulled the trigger, not taking careful aim, but nevertheless closing one eye as though he were looking down the sights at her. The noise

of the explosion drowned out the sound of his running down the hall and the creaking of the floor under his feet. It was several moments before the ringing in my ears had died out, and by that time there was the sound of people running through the house, flinging open the doors of the heated rooms and of the unheated rooms as they raced toward us on the second floor.

For a long time I lay against the white plaster wall, trembling because I, who was the father, allowed without protest the girl to be taken away, and shaking because I was cold in the unheated room.

## *Father and Son*

BY MORLEY CALLAGHAN

(From *Harper's Bazaar*, New York)

THE old stone farmhouse stood out sharp and clear against the dark hill in the moonlight. He walked up the path a little, then realized he was walking right into the flood of light from the window. This scared him and he stopped. 'Why did I feel that I had to come?' he thought. 'After waiting four years why do I come now? What am I doing here?' And he looked all around the little valley, at the huge old barn shadowing all the hill and at the little garden beside the house. He heard the old car that had picked him up going rumbling back through the ruts on the road. There was a heavy mist in the valley. The soft Pennsylvanian hills rose up clear above the floating mist and were rounded against the sky.

He was so afraid of his own uneasiness and the valley's silence that he darted forward right through the shaft of window light and rapped firmly on the door. When the door was opened Mona was there with her hand still on the knob and her little body leaning forward, and while all the light was falling on his bewildered, shy face he could do nothing but stare at her and wait. 'Oh, it's you, Greg. We were expecting you sometime soon,' she said. 'We heard the car coming up and going away and wondered who it was.'

She could not help looking for a long time at Greg Henderson, wondering what had happened in his life to drive him back here after four years. He was hesitating awkwardly there at the door, tall and dark, in his fine expensive city clothes, but really much older, and the light was all on his worried face that looked scared and ashamed: it was puzzling to Mona to see him so reticent and lonely looking, because she knew he had always been full of eagerness, giving all of himself first to one thing and then to another, full of love, and then getting hurt, and then hard and

unyielding and never consenting to go anyone else's way. As he blinked his eyes in the light he looked humble. He had none of the fine plausible flow of easy words he had had in the old days. He said, halting, 'I was walking up from the station. They picked me up on the road,' and then he followed her into the big lamplit room with the great open hearth, and for the first time he was able to look at her. Her body was enveloped in a large white apron. Her long black hair fell soft and thick around her oval face, and she was looking at him steadily with her peaceful dark eyes in a way that made him more uneasy than ever. 'I got your letter, Greg, and so you must have got mine.'

'Maybe I oughtn't to have come at all,' he said.

'Why shouldn't you come, if you wanted to?' she asked candidly.

There was the sound of someone moving in the kitchen. A short, broad-shouldered, bony-faced young man with thick, light hair appeared holding a pail in his hand. He was wearing a short leather jacket, as if he had just expected to go out, and he stood there, grinning a little at Mona and eyeing Greg with a frank curiosity as if he had heard all about him without ever having seen him.

'You've heard me speak of Greg Henderson, Frank,' Mona said.

'Hello, Mr. Henderson,' Frank said with a kind of good-humoured warmth. There was a broad, comprehending smile on his strong face, as he put out his hand and said, 'Are you hungry, old man? Not at all? You'll be staying the night with us anyway, won't you?'

'I hadn't thought about it. Are you sure you have room?'

'We're awfully proud of our guest room,' Mona said. 'Show Greg our guest room, Frank.'

In the young man in the leather jacket there was now the good-natured condescension of a proprietor who realizes that his good nature is gratuitous and not at all necessary. With his laconic, straightforward manner he seemed to be

saying to Greg, 'You see, I let you come into my house. I even welcome you. I even smile and shake hands heartily with you, because I want you to be comfortable, because what you think is so very important is no longer important at all.' He was saying this with his frank easy smile and his steady shrewd eyes. He was very poor here in the country, but very happy. He was a social revolutionary, and by making frequent trips into the city in his old car he tried to participate in many of his party's activities. His strong faith had made Mona happy, too, and both of them were standing there with such assurance, smiling softly and patiently at Greg as though he were just a child.

'Stay the night,' Mona said.

'Maybe I'd better stay the night.'

'Come on upstairs, old man, and I'll show you we've got a room for you,' Frank said.

'Little Mike is asleep, but maybe we could take a peek at him when you're ready,' Mona said.

Greg followed Frank up the narrow twisting staircase that was built in the thick wall of the old farmhouse, and into a little room with a window, a low beamed ceiling and a narrow bed. 'You'll be comfortable for the night,' Frank said. 'Feel at home while you're here. We want you to feel at home. Mona has told me all about you.' He was speaking in an easy, jolly, friendly way, but the composure that was in his voice made Greg feel his own utter unimportance. Greg was an opinionated, arrogant man with a natural fierceness in his nature, and he could not help saying, 'Did she tell you about me?' but then in a panic, without waiting for an answer, he went right on saying, 'This is a fine place in the country. A man ought to have such a place. The country is very beautiful but a little melancholy. I felt it in me walking on the road, maybe it was just the darkness and the softness of the hills,' and he kept on talking like this till they started to go downstairs again.

'I was just going down the road a piece to get the milk,

Frank explained. 'Maybe you'll be wanting to take a peek at Mike with Mona.' Picking up the can that he had brought from the kitchen, he went out brusquely, leaving Mona and Greg standing there, listening first to his footfalls and then to the sound of his whistling as he went down the road.

Then Mona smiled in a sympathetic agreeable way as she said, 'You can come and see Mike if you want to.' And Greg followed her meekly, going upstairs again and tiptoeing into another little room and standing beside her, bending over a cot. There was enough early moonlight flooding the room to show the soft lines of the sleeping boy's face. Mona and Greg bent down over the bed, and Greg began to feel a strange excitement, then a vast uneasiness like a rising and falling of life within him, as he tried to make out the shape of his own boy's head. It was for this that he had come, after a few years of forgetting and then a short month of restless wondering, and now, bending over the bed and feeling the mother so quiet beside him, he had a wild hope that the great heavy beating of his own heart might sound so loud in the room it would wake up the boy.

But Mona, with her finger to her lips, was beckoning him, and he tiptoed out behind her and followed her downstairs.

While he walked up and down the room, not daring to look at Mona or speak to her, he felt how undisturbed and peaceful she was as she sat in the old rocking-chair. Mona had always been so tender with him when there had been any suffering in him, and yet now, when he was most wretched and deeply suffering, she waited, quiet, still, without any emotion. In her peacefulness he could feel how unimportant he had become, he could almost hear her husband saying to her many times, 'A no account lawyer, a little bourgeois thinking his little middle-class emotions and his sentimentality can hold you and crucify you for ever. That's all over with and it's no longer important that he once loved you and left you. The poor fool.' Greg felt himself hating the brusque confident man in the leather jacket who had gone



whistling along the road. Turning, he began to stare at Mona, staring at her white, round, soft face, and then, moving slow, he went over to her and put out his hand and whispered, 'Mona, it's unnatural for you to be so calm with me. Everything we ever said or thought together seems to be in me now,' and he put out his hand to touch her.

Her hands had been quiet in her lap and her face had been full of soft contentment, but when he came toward her, reaching out to touch her with his hand, her face took on a wretched fearful look that destroyed swiftly all the calmness and beauty her new faith had given her. She looked now like she had looked the last times he had seen her and she was saying, frightened, 'Don't come near me, don't touch me.'

'I won't, Mona. Such a feeling isn't really in me and you must forgive me. It's just meanness I was feeling because you were so peaceful and content and I wanted to disturb you,' and he really was ashamed because he knew, too, that it was out of his hatred of her husband's confidence that he was trying to disturb her and trying to assert his own strength. 'The boy is feeling fine, isn't he?'

'His health has been good. In the morning you can talk to him and play with him.'

'I can have him for hours?'

'As long as you wish.'

Then Frank came in with the milk and took off his leather jacket and the three of them sat down to talk for a while. They asked Greg about the city. They were living here in the country, but they longed for any bit of news about the city. Their talk grew quite animated. Gradually Frank began to talk about social problems with some enthusiasm because it was the subject that had most power over all his thoughts, and he talked at Greg, knowing he had another point of view, and his voice rose and he waved his hand, and then his voice softened and he was patient with Greg as though he were an old enfeebled man who had been a

slave all his life. Greg hated every word he said. But when he interrupted him there was a sharp hostile silence between them. In these moments of silence they looked at each other strangely, they realized they were there together, they felt the country silence outside, and they did not like it. Greg wanted Frank to go on talking. He glanced at Mona and felt how full she was of her husband's faith.

Then Mona said, 'Maybe Greg is tired, Frank, after walking most of the way to the station. Maybe he wants to go to bed.'

'I'm sorry, old man,' Frank said considerably. 'Don't let us keep you up. We go to bed early around here, anyway. Are you sure there's nothing we can do for you?'

'Nothing at all,' Greg said, and after saying good night to them he went up to the bedroom. But he was so wide awake he could hardly keep still. He stood at the window looking out over the little valley lit by the moonlight. He heard the trickling of water in the nearly dried up creek, but every other part of the night was dreadfully still. And he was thinking that everything that had been tragic or had hurt deeply in Mona's life had been smoothed out here in the quietness of this mist-laden valley, and he was thinking, too. 'She never looked as lovely when she loved me as she did sitting there in the chair to-night. The tortured look that came into her face belonged to our time together.' It was terrible to feel that once there had been such hot strong passion in both of them and now he was here, welcomed calmly by her, as though he were a visitor or a stranger who was utterly unimportant in her life. He wanted to cry out in a loud voice and break the night's calmness, but he threw himself on the bed and sighed and rubbed his head in the pillow and groaned within him, feeling it a terrible thing that all the ecstasy, all the joy of loving that used to be between them was gone, didn't live at all to-night. Then he heard them coming up to bed. He heard them undressing. They must have lain down together, for soon he heard them whispering peacefully. The whispering between them had

a fine evenness, her whispering and murmur blending and made one with the low murmur of his voice. 'There's nothing I've held on to I possess no part of anything that's here,' Greg thought 'I don't touch their life at all,' and he felt humility and even a little peacefulness in himself.

In the morning he went downstairs with a humble eagerness to see his son. It was like feeling that something mysterious but very gratifying was about to happen. He was shy and smiling when he said good morning to Mona and Frank.

'Mike is in the kitchen finishing his breakfast,' Mona said.

'Can I go in?'

'Come on along,' she said, and they went together into the kitchen where a dark-haired, round-faced little boy was eating a piece of toast very seriously. His eyes were large and brown and soft like his mother's. He was so sturdy, handsome, and rosy-checked that Greg felt a marvellous delight in just looking at him, and he said suddenly, 'Hello, Mike.'

The boy looked at him gravely and then said without smiling, 'Are you my uncle?'

'A kind of an uncle,' Greg said awkwardly.

'Mother said my uncle might come and see me to-day. Aren't you really my uncle?'

'Sure, I'm your Uncle Greg.' Greg looked at Mona and they both smiled to each other, then they began to laugh easily. 'Will you go for a walk with your uncle while Daddy and I drive into town, darling?' Mona asked.

'All right,' the boy said laconically, and he went on eating his toast.

So later on, in a straightforward simple way, Mona and Frank got ready to go to town in order that Greg might be alone for a few hours with the boy. He stood at the door watching them get into the old battered automobile. It was a fine clear spring day. The car was on the other side of the little garden near the barn and beside a pile of red

shale. The ground on that side of the house was covered with this powdered red shale. When the car started, Greg and the boy standing beside him waved their hands.

Speaking soft and coaxing, Greg said to Mike, 'Will we go for a walk down the road, maybe all the way down the road to the river. Is it too far?'

'I've often walked that far with my father in the spring when he went fishing. I can walk twice that far. I can walk three times that far.'

As soon as they started to walk the little boy put up his hand and took Greg's hand firmly in his. This simple gesture moved Greg more than anything that had happened since he had come. He stared down at the boy's neck as they walked hand-in-hand along the red clay road, waiting for something mysterious to happen between them.

'Where are you from, Mister?' Mike asked.

'I'm from New York.'

'I guess it's too far away to walk there to-day, eh?'

'Much too far. It's miles away.'

'Are there a lot of little kids there?'

'The streets are full of little kids shouting and playing.'

'Do you know them? I'd like to see some kids. It's nice here, I like it here, but there are hardly any kids to play with,' he said gravely. Then he hesitated, looking up at Greg, wondering if he could be confided in completely. 'Would you let me come and see you in New York some time, Mister?' he asked.

Greg let his hand fall with a light gentleness on the boy's shoulder, caressing the shoulder timidly. 'I certainly will,' he said. But Mike shook his shoulder free of the hand, not that he was offended, but he was simply asserting that he was a boy and not to be petted. Greg loved his unspoiled childish directness. He longed to sit down with him and explain that they belonged to each other, or do some significant thing that would bring a swift light of recognition into the boy's eyes.

Mike was saying, 'Do you see that broken fence along there?'

'I see it '

'Would you bet me an ice-cream cone I can't jump over it?'

'Sure I will Do you want a cone, Mike?'

'Well, when we get this far on the road my father always bets me an ice-cream cone I can't jump that fence '

'Go ahead then '

The little boy went leaping forward with short strong steps and took a broad jump over the broken scantling that was only a foot off the ground, and he landed on his knees on the long thick grass by the roadside and rolled over on his back laughing Greg ran after him and stood beside him, watching him rolling around while he shouted 'Ho, ho, ho, ho, I fooled you You've got to buy me a cone now ' Bending down over him, Greg grabbed him and lifted him high in the air, holding him tight while he squirmed with helpless laughter When Mike was all out of breath, Greg put him down on the ground again

When they came to the little bridge over the creek and were standing a moment watching the sketers on the surface of the shallow water, Greg turned his head, looking far down between the hills, and he was surprised to see how the valley opened up from this point with the hills and the red barns with the hex signs over the doors and the dilapidated farmhouses flowing wide away into the immense valley of the Delaware that was full of noonday light, and down there the great river shone silver white on the green flat land, and farther beyond the river was cultivated land and maybe city land all rolled into soft blue hills, rising there grandly with the colour of a new unknown country that was suddenly touched by the same sunlight that was overhead. Greg kept looking away off there with a leaping excitement. He had promised Mona that he would not tell Mike that Frank was not his father, but he could not stop thinking, 'Why can't I take him away with me now? Why shouldn't I do it?'

Without answering, he gripped the boy's hand tight and began to walk faster, still looking ahead far down the valley.

'Isn't it a fine sight over there on a clear day, Mike?'

'That's nothing,' Mike said 'From the top of our hill on a clear day you can almost see the ocean '

'The ocean. There's no ocean there to see '

'My father said one day if you could only see far enough you'd see an ocean, and that's the furthest of all away '

'Think of all the towns you'd look over, Mike,' Greg said, and they kept on walking fast, going straight ahead. But at the little store where the roads crossed in what was called the village, they stopped to buy ice cream and an orange drink for Mike. Behind the counter was a lean slow-moving man with a completely disinterested expression on his face, who said with surprising amiability, 'You've got Molsen's kid along with you, eh,' and he made a very comical face at Mike, who was eating the ice cream greedily.

Then they went on again, going farther down the road, going toward the river and away from the hills, with Greg always holding the boy's hand tight and making him trot beside him. They were off the red clay road and down on the flat land where the road was grey and dusty when Mike said, 'I'm tired, Mister. Can't we stop a minute?'

'Are you very tired, Mike?'

'I want to sit down,' he said.

So they sat down by the ditch a few feet from the road in long thick grass and weeds covered thick with grey dust, and they didn't say anything, nor were they shy, but Mike merely began to cross his legs at the ankles the way Greg had crossed his. Then Greg, watching the boy, leaned all his weight back on his hands, and Mike did that too, smiling quickly. And after they had looked at each other a while, Greg leaned forward and linked his hands around his knees, whistling between his teeth and pretending to look seriously across the fields, and soon he heard a thin whistle coming from Mike, and glancing out of the corner of his

eye, he saw him, too, gravely staring at the fields. This moment became the most beautiful moment that Greg could remember in his life. As they sat there in the strong sun with the dust from an automobile blowing over them, he began to think, 'Maybe when he grows up he'll have many little gestures just like mine. Maybe he'll hold his head on one side the way I do, or his voice will sound like mine.' But while he was clinging to this fine moment and feeling real joy in these thoughts, he became aware that Mike, bit by bit, was snuggling closer to him, and when he looked down at him he saw that his eyes were slowly closing. He did not know why he was so fearful of having him fall asleep. He dared not let him fall asleep. 'Maybe you'd like to go back to the store, Mike, and get another ice-cream cone,' he said quickly. They got up and they went back along the road, and Mike was walking with the solemn, expressionless face of a tired little boy.

After Mike had had another cone and another orange drink they both sat down together on the edge of the store veranda. Mike said suddenly, 'I wish mamma would come,' and he kept looking down the road toward the highway. He could not stop his head from drooping and bobbing up and down. It was past his lunch-time. As they sat close together, raising their heads together whenever a farmer or a few city people there for the summer came into the store, Greg was wondering how it was that Mona could be happy with Mike here in these hills. 'Don't you get tired of this little place, Mike?' he asked. Mike heard him but did not answer; he was doing nothing but opening his eyes extraordinarily wide and then letting them close slowly. 'I'll pick him up and carry him to the station,' Greg thought. 'Why should I leave him here in this melancholy place to grow up with the wild notions of that arrogant man?' And while he was planning and pondering he felt the boy's head heavy against him. Mike was in a sound sleep. For a long time Greg stared at the boy's closed eyes and at the long lashes touching the cheeks, and then he thought with

utter misery, 'He was sitting there thinking and talking of Mona I've no right whatever to take him away from her I'm nothing to him really' In a kind of panic he picked Mike up and began to hurry back into the hills, saying angrily, 'Why does Mona stay away like this and not care what happens to him?' He hurried on, going back to the house, clutching the sleeping boy and feeling more and more wretched

He was almost in sight of the farmhouse before he heard the honking of a horn behind him When he stepped off the road and looked back, he saw the Molsens' old car swaying in the ruts Mona was leaning out, waving her hand cheerfully.

Full of resentment, Greg said, 'He's sound asleep What do you think of that?' and he stared at her as if she ought to give an account of herself to him But she only said, 'The poor little boy,' without noticing Greg at all. And Frank, who had nodded with the old, good-natured tolerance, simply put out his arms for Mike, lifted him into the car and put him on Mona's knee Without moving, Greg stood on the road, flustered, knowing only that he had not wanted Frank to take the boy from him in that way, and then he realized that they were wondering why he did not get into the car So he sat in the back seat, leaning forward, with his head only a foot from Mike's, listening to Mona clucking sounds all over his head with her lips. and yet he was utterly detached from them. They did not even ask him where he had been with Mike, for it did not occur to them that anything important could have happened So he said awkwardly, 'I must leave at once. I ought to have left an hour ago'

'Why didn't you say you had to go? We're so sorry,' Mona said

'It's all right Everything's all right,' Greg said

'Frank will drive you to the station whenever you're ready,' she said.

When they got to the house Greg got out of the car first, and he said eagerly, 'Let me carry him, Mona.'



'No I'll carry him You'll wake him,' she whispered  
'Wouldn't it be all right . . .' He intended to say, 'Wouldn't it be all right to wake him just to say good-bye?' but he fumbled, from wanting it so much, and he said instead, '—all right, just to carry him to the house?'

'Sh, sh, sh,' Mona said Mike's head was moving on her shoulder and he was wetting his red lips with the tip of his tongue. This was while they were going toward the house. So Greg kept watching Mike eagerly, hardly knowing what to hope for, but anxious for something that would destroy the desolation within him Once he even coughed, just at the door, and cleared his throat noisily, but there was nothing more for him than that one restless move of Mike's head

And when Greg was ready to leave, he stood at the door with Mona. He wanted to go, to hurry, but he felt such emptiness in going He wanted to shake hands heartily with Mona, to look at her directly, but his words came slow and groping. 'Good-bye, Mona You were good to let me come'  
'Good-bye, Greg,' she said, smiling and calm 'You come any time you want to come'

'I will,' he said, trying hard to conceal the dragging emptiness inside him There was one awkward moment, then he turned and was walking to the automobile, and then he heard Mona speaking in her mother voice, 'Did we wake you up, Mike? You still look half asleep.' Looking back, Greg saw Mike pushing past his mother and standing in front of her, and he was staring after him

'Where are you going, Mister?' Mike called.

'Back to the city, Mike.'

'Good-bye, Mister,' Mike called, and he went running toward Greg Grinning broadly, Greg bent down and caught him in his arms and lifted him high over his shoulders, shaking him and making him laugh again before putting him down. Then he kissed him with a quick eagerness and went on to the car, where Frank was waiting and watching

But before Greg could get into the car, Mike ran up to him again, only this time he stopped short a few feet away, with a puzzled, shy, wondering look on his face, feeling that someone he liked a lot and had felt very close to immediately was leaving him for some reason he did not understand.

But this look on Mike's face brought a surge of joy to Greg, and he, too, looked back a long time, half smiling, wanting so much to believe that the look on the boy's face came from the same kind of feeling that had been in his own heart when he had felt compelled to return to him. This one look, just making them both feel there might have been much love between them, was something like what he had waited for when he had watched Mike sleeping last night.

So Greg was smiling when he did finally get into the car. He waved cheerfully at Mona. He sat down beside Frank and looked at him in a direct friendly way. He almost wished Frank could forgive him for being a professional man who had done well in the last two years. But he couldn't help saying almost triumphantly as the car started, 'You certainly have to admit he's a fine boy.'

## *Bus to Biarritz*

BY MADELENE COLE

(From *Story and Short Story Manuscripts of 1934*)

THE woman and the girl stood at the crossroads, their high heels deep in the sand of the road. There was no shade from the dusty pines overhead nor any sign of a breeze from the ocean pounding hard on the beach beyond. The girl, coughing dryly, shifted the worn bag that sagged against her thin ankles. The woman, small, vigorous and English, rattled the paper hat-bag in her hand and scowled up the road. They were waiting for the bus to Biarritz.

'It is always the same. You stand here and wait for minutes—hours, then all of a sudden not one, but two buses jump at you from around the corner. They race with each other, y'know.' The woman passed a thin handkerchief over her carefully made-up face. 'And they have no sense of schedule. It is like the whole resort—stupid-looking cottages, no decent roads, a beach too treacherous to bathe from and an expensive club.'

'But it's cheap,' said the girl. A shabby hat hung like the skin of some ripe fruit from her hand, leaving her hair free to shine in the sun and she stood silently, as though she would never leave that spot.

'It's cheap and it's near Biarritz—half-hour by car the circulars say, but how should I know? I can only afford the bus while you—' She edged nearer the girl, lowering her voice. 'Tell me, doesn't he think it strange that you should live way out here? After to-night, of course, everything will be different.'

'I don't mind the bus. Besides it's quiet here—peaceful.'

'Oh—quiet. Tell me, from to-night on, you will be staying at Biarritz with him, won't you?'

'Yes,' said the girl.

'Well, that's a relief. You don't know how lucky you are. He's a catch and not old either and in these times—my!

If you knew what some would give for your chance. Of course it's your youth. They want them young to-day, even in Europe I can remember in my time a woman of forty or fifty attracted all the attention but not now.'

'You're not old,' said the girl kindly

'That's because I've taken care of myself, and you must do the same. You must plan first, last and always for your future, for the possibility of being left alone. He will want to buy clothes for you, because all Frenchmen are passionately interested in women's clothes, but use your wits and get him to buy jewels—they never go out of style.' Her voice rose to a shriek. 'Ah—the bus,' she cried. 'And two of them. What did I tell you?'

The two buses, careening from side to side, swung sharply around the corner, coming to a violent stop at their feet. The drivers, both swarthy young Basques covered with dust and perspiration, jumped down immediately and began applying themselves to their steaming engines. With great dignity the woman walked over to them, pointing to the watch on her wrist. Then she began to argue loudly over schedules. Her French was voluble, crisp and assured.

As though she did not hear, the girl climbed into the first bus, settling her bag beside her, and with her rag of a hat lying limp in her lap, sat patiently waiting. The bus was top-heavy and old-fashioned with long, narrow seats at each side. Through the small, dirty windows the brightness of the sandy road and the blue sky seemed but a distant, blurry glare. The girl watched the young Basque (as if each motion was slow timed) lift a battered can and pour water into the front of the bus. Then as though she were still looking at some distant scene, she saw the woman finish her harangue and flounce up the high steps of the bus.

'And you say you like to ride on the bus,' snorted the woman. 'It's only because you are leaving all this squalor that you can speak so freely.' The girl, after one more look at the misty landscape, turned her head around and stared in front of her. And as the bus shook, trembled and finally

moved, she continued staring at the scratched frames around the bus windows but never once looking back towards the sea

'Did you ever see such driving?' The bus, gathering speed, lunged clumsily around a team of oxen, leaving them in a cloud of dust and sand. 'These drivers are brothers, y'know, and they work for rival bus companies. All they think about is racing with each other. And they have no sense of schedule—I told them that. No sense of time, I said, not like England at all.' She went on talking, talking, talking. 'It is especially aggravating when we are in such a hurry, at least you are in a hurry. I suppose he will be meeting you at the bus. Should have thought he would have called for you, in style.'

'No, this is fine,' said the girl steadily. 'And I am not in a hurry. I am not in a hurry at all.'

Soon they were off the narrow, sandy road and passing through a tall forest of pine trees, their sides laid bare in monotonous ugly strips, punctured at the base for the turpentine tapping. 'Ah, a bit cooler,' said the woman. 'And imagine, in Paris they are counting the coals they put on the fires with frozen fingers. Here, people are dodging the sun.' Suddenly the bus took a sharp turn up a side road, in the direction of the beach again.

'No,' said the woman, 'they simply can't go out to the little Cap, I won't have it. It isn't on the schedule. We shall never arrive at Biarritz at four if they do.' She was about to rap on the window and signal the driver when he stopped, promptly and expertly in front of a dilapidated fishing cottage. Then he swung down from his perch, sauntered up the untidy walk, politely kicked two mangy dogs out of the way and thundered with his knuckles on the door. 'M'sieu, M'sieu, it is me, the bus,' he cried. The tousled head of a man appeared from a side window, called out a reply and a hand slammed the window shut.

'It is simply idiotic. I feel for you, m'dear. A man hates to be kept waiting.'

'I don't mind if we go out to the little Cap,' said the girl. 'I should like to see the ocean once more.'

'But it is the same ocean you will be seeing in Biarritz. I don't understand you, really. You will have a suite of rooms at a smart hotel overlooking the rocks, the beach, the famous promenades, the shops—everything. But you must get some good clothes right away. You haven't got a thing. I have often wondered why he—tell me, m'dear, did you meet this man in Paris when you were modelling? I have often wondered'

'No, on the train coming down, and I had on a lovely black dress covered with sprigs of mimosa and a black hat. I bought them from the shop where I worked. So you see I have one good dress, but I did not wear it at the little hotel. I have it in here.' The girl patted her bag. 'I have been saving it. In Biarritz, it was possible to go almost anywhere in beach things or pyjamas.'

'Or a bathing suit. Nowadays a girl really needs little except a good figure. Well, you don't have to worry about that. But you are a strange girl. Most girls would be so excited and upset and happy. After all, you have had little but hardships from what you say. In Paris you danced and lost your job, and then you modelled and lost your job and then you became ill and finally landed down here on your last cent. When I was your age I knew what I was about. My mother had chucked me out because she considered me too beautiful to ever amount to any good and I took up with an elderly man—rich, y'understand, and a gentleman. You may be sure I opened a bank account immediately and now I don't have to worry. I get about in season, living modestly of course, and I'm able to return to England at least once a year.'

The man with the tousled head slammed his front door, buttoned his worn coat and then ran back hurriedly to shout many good-byes to his children in the rear of the house. Finally he climbed into the bus, going up in front to sit with the driver.

'But Americans never know what they want,' the woman went on, glaring at the latest passenger, who had already started an animated conversation with the driver.

The bus went rumbling down the narrow sandy road to the beach, past shabby cottages with nets hung to dry outside, a small store, its front covered with espadrilles, brilliantly striped and dangling, in tied bunches, in the sun. 'I meant to buy a pair before I left,' said the girl. 'They are so comfortable on your feet and they make you feel sort of like a native.'

'You speak as though you were never coming back.'

'He would not like it here.'

'No, it is not fashionable, it is shabby. Do you realize that we have not seen a decent respectable person on the road yet? They're all back on the main road to Biarritz, riding in private cars. These peasants all look alike.'

'I walked out here alone one day. The tide came up and made a heavenly pool, just like a little lake. I waded in and the water swirled around me, higher and higher.' The girl leaned forward, hopefully. They were nearing the ocean, and the lazy outlines of sand dunes, jutting here and there with hollows made by a fierce sea, stood out hazily against the blue sky. The bus sidled up to a low white beach pavilion and stopped, the driver and his amiable passenger getting out in front for a smoke.

'I think I'll have a look at the water myself.' The girl jumped down quickly from the bus as though the woman might stop her. The beach was bare except for a group of bathers guarded cautiously by a lifeguard who stood, planted firmly and with arms akimbo, clad in red flannels to his heels. Leaning against the railing, the girl watched a man, evidently the father of the children in the group, venture out daringly to where the water was waist deep. It was not rough but the waves hit hard, climbing along the sand in long even rolls. The women, their eyes on the man, began shrieking at the lifeguard who took a careful step forward. The man struck out, took two or three strokes, parallel with

the beach and then walked in shivering to where the women were waiting. Chattering compliments, they rushed at him with towels, making him sit down and rest.

'Well, I hope you've had enough,' said the woman as the girl climbed back into the bus. 'Did you ever see such an exhibition?' No wonder they all drown around here—they're scared to death!'

'They're like children. I love to watch them—they get so excited.'

'You won't say that when you've lived here as long as I have. You'll get to know them better.' The men had returned to the bus. 'Come on,' called the woman. 'No use waiting all day.' The driver, holding a bit of paper in his hand kept looking toward the pavilion. Finally a sturdy French child, followed by his nurse, scrambled eagerly aboard, spraying the seats with sand from his pail. The nurse caught up the pail, apologized in rapid French and slapped the child's hands. The driver, bowing elaborately to the nurse, tore the note into bits and flung them out of the window.

'Can you imagine! Somebody gave him a note to call for the child. It's agonizing. Simply agonizing.'

The bus turned and rattled down the road, past the shabby cottages, the store and a wine cart bristling with straw and bottles. It was drawn by a small donkey patiently prodded by a gnarled old peasant clumping along in wooden sabots and a tattered smock. The fresh salty crispness of the air was gone now and soon they would be back on the main road with its gasoline fumes, its noise and its pretentious villas.

'Ah—Biarritz,' breathed the woman as the bus rolled smoothly out on the main road. 'Soon we shall be there and I shall have a porto after my shopping. You needn't worry about me. I won't go with you to spoil the meeting. I shall get off at the stop after. But I shall remember you always, even though I never see you again, for although we have been but casual acquaintances, still we have much in common.'



The girl looked at her closely, for the first time. 'But you must come to call. I can't be alone.' She turned to hide her concern.

The woman was gratified. 'Don't imagine, my dear, that I have told anybody at the hotel a thing. I have not violated your confidences. After all, you had to talk to somebody, just sitting on the beach all day alone—'

'There are many things more,' the girl started, 'that I should like to tell you. Many things. That is the trouble. I have had nobody really, to confide in. You have been good but you can understand my confusion of the past few days.'

'Naturally. Some other time you must tell me—everything, but now we are nearing the convent and it is but a scant half-hour from there.' The woman started to smooth her skirts primly. When they reached the carefully tilled acres of the convent, so rich and green compared to the dry sandy beach from which they had just come, the girl stretched up her arm and dusted off a square on the window behind her. Then she looked far into the distance, up to the rolling hills where the convent buildings were located.

'I wonder if I shall ever go home again,' she said.

The woman was roused to immediate animation. 'Of course, and you will be a big success, assured, experienced—I tell you a touch of Europe does a girl no harm. But remember, in this country you occupy a position of some dignity and you must live up to it. He will expect you to act like a lady. Of course he will want to show off your beauty and take you around, but be careful. Don't drink too much and don't smile at any of his friends—that is, unless they're wealthier than he is, in which case, use your wits.' The bus started to slow down. They had reached a cheap little section, flagrant with advertising bills posted over shabby squat buildings. 'If he stops again and we have to wait!' wailed the woman.

The bus came to a stop at a corner where a large bundle of an old woman stood, resting heavily on the arm of a

middle-aged man. She was so old and ponderous and the man so completely uninterested in getting her safely and comfortably into the bus that the driver and the workman jumped down to help. It was some time before they got her settled in the bus, her shabby black skirt hanging limp and creased around her shapeless mass of a body and her head, drooping and sad, draped in many frayed shawls. The man settled himself stiffly at her side, looking first at his hands and then out of the window. He offered no consoling whispers to the old woman nor did he bother to even look at her again.

There was something very disturbing about the age and helplessness of the old woman. Seated directly opposite from them, both the woman and the girl looked at her, fascinated. She had the stamp of the country on her withered features and her tattered garments bore the imprint of its soil.

'She must be blind,' said the woman, trying to keep the sympathy from her voice. 'And he acts ashamed of her so that I do not imagine he is her son. He does not speak to her so she is probably also very deaf. Well, that is age for you and when these peasants become as old and helpless as she is, they are really old.'

The girl, sunk in her seat, was looking at the old woman's hands. A glint of gold showed between her lumpy fingers which remained half hidden in the dusty folds of her skirt. Then the old woman's lips started to move. Rather, they drooped, sagged and then drooped again. Everything about her yellow wrinkled face seemed to droop, the triangular patches under her sightless eyes and the dirty creased pouches which were her cheeks. The small crucifix remained half hidden in her hands, its thin chain looped over her fingers. She kept working it back and forth, its bright metal glinting in the fast moving patches of sunlight that flashed across her through the window of the bus. Then the bus swung around the corner and she lunged forward, helplessly, almost falling off her seat.

'She is going to faint,' cried the girl leaning across the aisle to steady her. The man turned coldly and pushed the

old woman back in her seat. For many moments he disregarded them but when the woman, digging around in her handbag, finally offered a small vial of smelling salts he waved it away angrily. Then he began to speak rapidly.

'He says that she has never been on a conveyance before,' interpreted the woman. The man, his face working with anxiety, addressed himself to the woman in the soft slurring patois of the Basque and he spoke with an air of explanation as though something must be said about why a neatly dressed gentleman like himself should be seen with such a hag.

'She is going to the Poor Farm outside of Biarritz and he is angry because he had to leave his work to escort her there. She has worked for his family all her life but lately she has been very sick and he has no money for a doctor and she has caused lots of trouble. The Poor Farm will not send for her and of course he cannot spend the money for a private conveyance. Just the other day she had a fit and now she cannot even be left to watch the children. It is especially annoying to him because she has no family to take her off his hands.' The woman stopped and looked at the man and then said in English, 'The poor thing has been a slave of course, a slave, nothing else but a slave.'

'And this is her last ride,' said the girl. 'Anyone can see that.'

'Yes, all her life she has plodded beside the oxen in the field and tended children for somebody else and now, at last, she is treated to a ride.' The woman leaned her head back and laughed shrilly. 'Can you imagine! And some women get even less out of life.'

'My grandmother,' whispered the girl, 'was very old when she died but she was useful to the end and very hard working.'

'Ah, you come of strong stock,' said the woman, 'anyone can see that.'

'No, my mother is not strong.'

The old woman emitted a sound, not a cough or a sigh but something like an empty prolonged groan. The man beside her moved impatiently.

The girl, her eyes still watching the old woman, began to talk eagerly, hurriedly, aware of the fact that the bus was lumbering closer to her destination each minute. 'My mother slaved all her life too, and now she is old. That's why I am here, I tell you' She stopped as the nurse, from the front of the bus, cried sharply to the driver and started to collect her things

The child, who had fallen asleep suddenly against his nurse's side, was prodded and his hands pushed into small white cotton gloves. They stood up, the nurse clapping her paper-back novel shut and leaning over the driver's seat to say good-bye. He drew the bus cautiously to the kerb for them, running around to assist the child

'I guess I had something else in mind for myself besides this,' said the girl as the bus started up again 'But my father hasn't worked in over five years and I made up my mind I wasn't going back empty-handed—you know how it is'

The woman tried to soothe her 'Yes, I know, I know Come now Put on your hat, and how about a little powder and lipstick? You look pale'

'I only took this dancing job in Paris because I thought I could help out You don't know how tough it's been in America the past few years'

'I do know,' said the woman 'I do know indeed. Something terrible, I've been told Worse than the War'

The girl stood up grasping the handle of her bag, her hat crushed in her other hand 'I don't want you to think I'm always complaining. Of course I know I'm lucky—'

'The Rue Alexandria, for Mademoiselle,' called the woman. 'Good gracious, he was going to fly right past your stop'

The girl leaned over swaying a little with the motion of the bus. 'I guess I wouldn't feel so funny but for one thing—'

'Oh come, you've got nothing to worry about,' said the woman with a small, nervous laugh

'It's this—I've never been with a man before I don't know what it's all about.'

'My!' The woman plastered her right hand against her cheek and shook her head. 'You Americans! Why didn't you tell me? Naturally, I thought what with your dancing and working in Paris and anyway, the young people nowadays are so free! Why!'

'I'll call you up when I know where I—where we'll be staying.' The girl walked to the end of the bus. 'It's a nice day, isn't it—swell! Look at the clouds.'

'Yes. Yes. It's fine.' The woman waved her arm and tried to smile encouragingly. 'Well, good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye.' Her arm dropped and she said to herself weakly, 'Well I must say—I must say.'

The bus drew up to the curb and the girl got out. For some minutes the woman did not turn her head but as the bus went down the hill she looked back. She saw a large car parked at the corner and the girl walking towards it.

The bus was coasting down the hill and between streets, built high with rich villas, could be caught glimpses of the bright blue sea. Soon the rocks could be seen, impressively bordering the coast with the ocean foaming at their base and smart hotels, restaurants and shops posed on their tops. Down in the hollows where the waters swirled placidly, crowds of people bathed. The bus stopped for the woman and she got out, shoulders erect, looking neither to the right nor left, her hat bag clasped firmly in her hands.

The middle-aged man had moved up in front and was laughing and talking with the driver, leaving the old woman to sit alone. Her head was bowed over and her hands made no movement. When the bus started to ascend the hill her head jerked up and she gasped. The hand that held the crucifix reached out and then fell leaden, in her lap. Suddenly she stiffened all over, a small gurgling sound coming from her throat and she toppled. As she fell, the crucifix sprawled with her, dangling from a purple hand. The sun flooded the seat where she had sat and the bus, gathering speed, lumbered up the hill out of Biarritz.

## *Triple Jump*

BY CHARLES COOKE

(From *New Stories*)

THE young man sauntered across the big platform, walking well to the rear of the four acrobats—two men, two women—who were turning somersaults and cart-wheels on the canvas mat that was dazzlingly white in the glaring October sun. His blue trousers were pressed to a knife edge and he wore a purple shirt and a purple tie, no hat. The vigorous hot-cold autumn wind riffled his brown hair.

He stopped, truculent, in front of the pudgy little red-faced man who fidgeted by the platform's stairway. 'Well?' he said, in an unfriendly, broodingly obstinate tone.

The fat man spoke, keeping his voice low with an effort and his eyes unwaveringly on the other's mildly good-looking face—trying to combat its glum, confident composure. 'Whistler, you *got* to do it. I just been over to Ben's tent again and he's sick all right—doctor says his temperature's a hundred and two and won't hear of letting him jump. Our next stand is two weeks off and Ben'll be okay then, it's just a touch of grippe he's got. He'll be okay then an' he can go up. It's just this one time—' wheedling now.

'I know,' said the other, in the firm voice of one who is abjectly appealed to for aid and can give it or withhold it. 'I know it's just this one time. An' I know I ain't no parachute jumper.'

'What do you mean you ain't a parachute jumper? You are. One o' the best I ever seen—an' I've seen a pile of 'em. You're born to it. If you wasn't pullin' down so much with your whistlin' you could be makin' as much or more, just jumpin'. Why, that single you took at Delhi when Ben was sick last year was a beauty.'

'Well, a single's all right. I got guts fer that, if it's a good balloon an' the wind ain't too high. But you want me to do

the works this time—a triple, and out of a new balloon I don't know nothin' about. And in a wind. You ain't got a prayer o' gettin' me to do it so you might as well pipe down.'

He turned away with an air of finality and watched the acrobats mechanically finishing up their act. They made—while a perfunctory ripple of applause floated over from the gaunt grandstand from the two thousand people who had been watching their capers with faint interest—the usual stylized act-end gestures of small-time vaudevillians, kissed their hands, then walked to the rear of the platform, where each donned a bright, flimsy dressing-gown. The applause still fluttered lightly; they skipped back on to the mat that basked white in the sun, gestured and kissed hands again, then turned and filed towards the stairway. Both men stepped a little to one side to let them pass, and the younger one caught the questioning, anxious glance cast by the lithe and muscular woman who was last, as she provocatively, self-consciously, passed them.

The two were silent after the four disappeared. A low susurration of voices reached them from the spectators, and from the broad race-track that coursed between platform and grandstand came the *thud-thud-thud* of a trotting horse pulling its rubber-tyred sulky and high-perched, gloved driver up and down on short practice runs. The fourth race of the afternoon would be held in ten minutes, as soon as Whistler's act, scheduled next, was over.

'Damn it, Whistler, you ought to be glad o' the chance,' the fat man suddenly burst out. 'You ain't got so much money you can turn up yer nose at twenty-five hundred dollars!'

'Oh, fer Christ sake, all you can think of is yer contract, yer contract! If the damn balloon don't go up at all you don't get yer two hundred dollars. An' yer just yellin' twenty-five hundred at me to try an' get me to go up. Whaddaya mean, twenty-five hundred? I get twenty-five hundred if I jump outa the first parachute into the second and outa the second into the third, don't I? An' I get a

measly three hundred if I jump outa the first into the second and come down in the second, don't I? An' I get *seventy-five* if I come all the way down with the first parachute and don't open the other two at all. An' me, I've jumped just once before in my life, an' just to help you out—same as you want me to help you out now. So's you'll get yer two hundred.'

'Listen, old man. You jumped once, an' it was a beauty. Now just go up this time, see, an' if it don't look like you'll make it okay, don't open the thud chute at all. Or fer the matter o' that, come all the way down in the first one, if it don't look good after you start down. But you can open the second right away as soon as the first one drops you a little ways—I don't need to tell you, you've seen Ben do it enough times—an' you can drop with the third any time up to you're within three hundred feet o' the ground. Listen. The fire's been burnin' three hours, and the bag—she's a beauty, Whistler, best I ever seen—is better'n half full. She's beginnin' to strain the ropes a little and pretty soon I'll have the kids hangin' on to 'em. She'll be ready in an hour and you got lots o' time to finish up yer turn and get into Ben's suit. You could use a little extra money, you know you could. An' if you do the works you get twenty-five hun—'

A huge windy voice boomed a barely distinguishable announcement with such hoarse cracking power that it seemed to shear away from in front of the fat man's lips the words that had been tumbling so glibly out of them, quick greasy sycophantic words that had had the driving force back of them of a clearly visioned packet of four fifty-dollar bills that might or might not become his. He stopped speaking and the megaphoned voice thundered on, to two thousand apathetic people who wanted the next race to begin. '... thee most fam-ous imatator of bird songs in thee world will now present some of his fam-ous imatations of bird songs. It gives us great pleasure to interduce—  
WHISTLER JONAS'

Whistler stepped lightly and jauntily on to the white mat,



executed the whole short action as though he had been standing alone. his manner, purposely, did not show that in walking away with no farewell he had stretched, to break, and had broken, coarse intangible cords of conflict with another human being. The fat little man, his perspiring face now blood-red with vexation, turned sharply as he realized the rebuff, puffed down the stairway and off across the rolling, olive-green sward of the Fair Grounds.

Roofed-over grandstand and thee most famous imitator of bird songs in thee world faced each other in the tonic air that had in it the bitter-sweet elixir of smoke from bonfires of autumn leaves. a slight, purple-shirted, blue-trousered man standing on a white mat in front of the yawning maw of steel-and-wood behemoth in which two thousand human beings were carelessly attentive. He was just past thirty and, because of a quick ear and flexible lips and tongue and the ability to practise long hours, one of the best imitators of bird songs in the world. *Variety* had said so, and so had *Zit's* and the *Billboard*, but his mind, slow for all his quick ear, turned back to those printed acknowledgments of superiority less and less often—the heady exhilaration they caused at first had long since diminished to occasional comfort, and that was paling. He stood erect before the two thousand and struck out at their disinterest: an ant trying with its feelers to move a block of granite from its path.

‘With yer kind permission, ladeez and jepmuh,’ came his hin, thread-like tenor voice, ‘I will now present for yer approval my imitation of a canary bird.’

A series of bubbly, rustling chirrup, followed by several hort pure notes, tentative, very canary-like, issued out of his throat—quintessence in sound of a pertly hopping yellow-and-white bundle of fluff. And this excellent work in canary imitation was practically lost by diffusion in the pungent air before it reached any of the ears mounted on heads that were lifting restlessly this way and that in an uneasy drab mass under the great roof.

Light blue eyes roving nervously over the distant, banked

unresponsiveness were unconcerned about the mechanics of the expert canary song that now carolled along liquidly and without a break; tanned forehead, sweating slightly, gleamed in the sun *but this county fair stuff is hell: nobody gives a damn you give 'em all you got an' all they can think of is the next race: different than playin' the road, all right on the road my act's a smash hit, every time they eat it up a big hand at the end an' three or four callbacks for bows before they'll let me go but this lousy county fair stuff* again the bubbly chirrups, the face suddenly wan and a little older *if she could see me knock 'em dead in Proctor's in Albany in winter but she only does the county fair circuit an' there ain't no chance she'd ever see me on the road where I really look like something but if she did maybe she'd think more of me and not be so damn mean like she is most of the time lately and gettin' meaner and meaner just because she knows I'm crazy about her but all she wants is money money money so she can buy clothes and jewelry and look swell but not fer me I know but fer that wop acrobat in her troupe and she knows damn well I'll give her all I got every time I'm flush plays me fer the sucker I am snuggles up and makes me think she's crazy about me and I give her all I got and she'll hardly notice me fer a couple of weeks until the next payday or when she knows I've made a haul bettin' on these damn trotting races then it's all soft soap again an' I hand her my jack like a god damned idiot it gets worse all the time and I know it'll keep on gettin' worse because I'm nuts about her an' she knows it but I ain't got a chance with her really with her seen' me all the time doin' my turn an' nobody listenin' if she only could see me on the road but she never will and anyway it looks more and more like she'll run off with that wop any day only he's dead broke I know and she is too and I bet that's why she's been snugglin' up to me again all this mornin' only I'm broke and she ought to know it but she was so damn sweet this mornin' an' she had that red silk dress on at breakfast the one that's so tight around her backside an' she knows it always makes me hotter when she wears it by God I bet she's been talkin' to Frank since she heard Ben was sick an' she knows Frank's tryin' to get me to go up that must make her eyes sparkle the dirty little two-timing whore all she can think about is money money money*

*so she can dress up and doll up fer that wop and she won't be seen with me except when she's after my wad I ought to have realized it long ago but I'm nuts about her but by God that must make her eyes sparkle twenty-five hundred if I make all three drops an' she knows she'd get most of it if she let me love her a couple of nights and three hundred is a lot to her a hell of a lot and even seventy-five is new shoes and a couple of dresses* a last high liting chirp concluded, but the introspective murmur of the crowd unchanged; and deep in him, below awareness, a slower, wordless flow—from a psychic fester that had been filling for months and only now was beginning sluggishly to seep

Several feeble hand-claps followed the difficult series of canary calls and songs, he took a step forward and bowed his vaudeville bow, smiling his vaudeville smile 'I will now present the mocking bird, with yer kind per—' he began, but looked blank then embarrassed when there came a sharply begun, sustained clatter of applause that mounted quickly in volume and was tasselled with yells. A dozen sulkies were suddenly on the track, seemed to have materialized from nowhere, and the nervous horses were being turned and backed by their nervous drivers, jockeying for position for the start, raising puffs and little eccentric spirals of the rich, cream-coloured track-dust the fourth race was about to begin. There had been an error somewhere: Whistler hadn't started the second number of his four-number turn. And the audience hadn't noticed and didn't care, was merely impatient now for the race to start instantly. He—flushed to mahogany, shame in his eyes—walked, head hanging, to the stairway that clung to the side of the squat platform, and down, his hand slipping along the hot shiny wooden banister, his eyes watching the crease in his blue trousers stiffen and relax with each step. As he stepped on to the blue-grey flagstone at the bottom, there was a soundless *plop* in the depths of this young man's soul the fester had burst.

In a pit with shaggy sides of crumbling amber earth, a raging wood fire, fiercely crackling, redly roared, a current

of buoyant gases flowed off the fire's top into a hole in the pit's side and quickly along a short underground passage and up, filling nearly full the new canvas balloon that, high and sharply white against the lacquer-hard blue of the sky, swelling slowly, strained first this way, then that, with increasing authority against the pulls of the circle of serious-faced boys who held, carefully and anxiously, short ropes radiating from its bottom. A larger circle enclosed fire, boys, and balloon sober-faced rustics—both sexes and all ages—milling slightly, pressing densely against ropes that held them from closing in in their curiosity and excitement. A banner rigged in the brief space between the two circles, dirty red on dirty white. 'TRIPLE JUMP!!! THREE DEATH-DEFYING LEAPS FOR LIFE—AT FOUR-THIRTY SIGNOR BENIAMINO GRASSELLI WILL MAKE HIS FAMOUS BALLOON ASENSION AND DROP TO THE EARTH FROM A COLLASSAL HEIGHTH IN THREE SEPERATE AND DISTINCT PARACHUTE JUMPS' It was a minute or two before four-thirty, and that body of people, arranged on the hot October earth in a loose pattern of a circle outside a circle, was being tightened and tightened by the cruel, acid, titillating knowledge that a man was to give himself irretrievably to naked danger, and that this was racing nearer and nearer, was on the edge of now. The outer circle thickened as newcomers, having run to join, melted in and quickly rose to the strained pitch of the rest.

From a little tent near the Ferris Wheel a slight man emerged and trotted to the outer circle; the yokels made quick way for him, out of deference to his pseudo-aviator outfit and the great package of three wadded parachutes strapped to his shoulder blades and the red 'GRASSELLI, THE DAREDEVIL' on the front and back of his jumper. Their hearts beat faster: seeing him at such close range was drawing nearer to danger; several murmured, 'That's him,' hoarsely and softly. Close behind him followed a short, fat man, his red face shining in the sun, peace in his eyes.

Whistler hurried across the little green space without looking to left or right. A throaty murmur; feet shifted and

necks craned. He went up to one of the boys and took the rope he was holding away from him. Kneeling, he busied himself with a knot. The slow, slight, majestic swaying of the great bulging balloon pulled all the short ropes a little, then released this gentle tug that had stated unmistakably, by this understatement, titanic strength. His hands trembled at the knot. He raised his eyes slightly, his eyelids fluttering nervously, and swept a quick glance around the inner side of the big circle until he glimpsed, among the drab farmer-clothes, a sharp accent—slimness in red silk. He dropped his eyes instantly, fumbled a second longer, straightened, handed the rope back to the boy, who took it respectfully and held tight again. 'That ain't Grasselli,' the boy whispered to his neighbour, as Whistler walked away, 'I seen Grasselli to the Oneonta fair last year, helped hold the balloon, that ain't him.' 'Ain't it?' asked the other. 'Well, why—'

Whistler was kneeling by the narrow board that was connected to the balloon by fifteen-foot lengths of stout rope—a slight, flat piece of wood—frailness that in a few short moments would be his sole protection against gravity's enormous suck. He jerked the two lengths of rope back and forth on the ground, called 'Hi!' to the two boys who stood in the way. They looked back over their shoulders and sidled, still holding tight their short ropes, crowding the boys next them. Whistler stood up with the board gripped in his whitish, blue-veined, apprehensive hands; in the new space he raised the ropes by lifting the board waist-high, stepped back a few inches to make sure there were no tangles. He held them cleanly taut a moment, then bent and replaced the board on the ground, straightened, slightly adjusted his heavy pack of parachutes, stepped over the board and reaching down lifted it to his buttocks and leaned his full weight against it.

He looked up at the white, high, faintly swaying mass of the full-to-bursting balloon.

'All right,' he called, over the noise of the fire, to the little red-faced man. And the crowd's heart beat faster and its feet shuffled.

'Look sharp now, boys,' shouted the little man, 'when I yell "Let 'er go!" drop yer ropes, every one of ya, and run outa the way as fast as ya can.' The youngsters were grey-faced with nervousness and at the highest peak of their alertness.

'Ready?' the little man barked at Whistler. Whistler nodded.

'Let 'er go!' The boys flung away their ropes and fanned out in a scrambling circular wave as the great bag leaped up yanking the seated Whistler—yellow grimy frightened face, puny helpless body—off the ground through the hot gases that suddenly roared more loudly out of the hole, and jerked him up up crazily and terrifyingly, diminishing fast (to the straining eyes of the crowd) into the burnished blue.

The balloon's tremendous bound away from its shackles tapered into a smoother, slightly slower, ascent. Whistler (throat rigid as metal, wild heart, lower teeth clamped against upper) slackened faintly his frantic grip on the ropes of the trapeze-like, amateurish seat, as his great pendulum swings lessened in arc with the increasing blandness of the rise. The black, sooty gases that leaked steadily out of the mouth of the balloon above his head floated below to right or left, as the air currents shifted.

Down under, the earth was blazing on fierce reds and russets of sere maples and oaks; past-summer dark green of pine forests opulently defined a long lake of sapphire spangled with billions of shifting tiny sungold flecks. The shabby oval of the Fair Grounds was a minor and unbeautiful detail in the reaching autumn mosaic.

He perched, eyes downward, seeing, but his brain not recording, that the earthscene below shrank infinitesimally in diameter from moment to moment and its horizons crept wider and wider *all I gotta do is cut the second chute loose after it opens and then not open the thurd not open the thurd not open the thurd by Jesus that'll stop her god damn playin' me fer a sucker and there couldn't be a better time to do it an' I've been thinkin' of down'*

*it fer a year off an' on and when I feel lousy I think about it all the time well there couldn't be a better time than now when that first chute opens she'll think she'll get seventy-five anyway even if I come all the way in it and don't open the others an' when I drop outa the first and open the second she'll jump up an' down and think she's sure of three hundred and then when I cut the second loose she'll be so happy she'll scream and throw her arms around the wop twenty-five hundred dollars and most of it comin' our way that's what she'll say the dirty selfish four-flushin' whore but I won't open no third chute I won't open no third chute an' by Jesus won't that square things up after all the times she's got my hopes up an' then let me down well this'll let her down like she was never let down before money means a thousand times more to her than anything else in the world it's almost funny how pat it is this way serve her just right serve her just right after it's over she can play around the wop all she's god damn minded to that wop that god damn wop this has been in my mind fer over a year gas poison slit my throat cut my wrists in a bathtub drown myself an' this is the best way if I can keep my guts an' go through with it maybe she'll suffer too and maybe she won't want to play around with him no more anyway fer a few days but she'll go back to him the wop ignerant wop is that a hawk or eagle away there they've got eagles around here I know saw one last year here bald eagle fella says it was bald my hair's thinnin' out an' I ain't got the snap I used to have how the hell could I play the next stand with him laughin' at me to my face more and more fer bein' a sucker she tells him all about it I know and her seein' me look like a monkey every time I do my turn I got more brains in a minute than he has in a thousand years but what the hell good does trainin' and practice do you on this lousy county fair stuff she never thought I had enough guts fer this an' maybe she'll cry and be sorry but I'd better not think of her nice or I won't have the guts the dirty selfish whore no use my thinkin' she ever wants anything but my money an' I know that know it know it he unclasped his right hand from the rope and crooked the forefinger into the ripcord of the first parachute, unclasped the left, hitched forward and dropped into the rare air, turning over and over while wind roared in his ears, until he pulled the cord and was jerked*

(a flood of sweet relief rushing into his soul, despite his mind's hysterical decision to face, in the next few moments, unthinkable violence) into a swinging easily dropping plummet under an inverted ribbed cup of translucent white, and the mosaic floated toward him, its details enlarging and the Fair Grounds becoming less minor (the balloon, its balancing agent gone, tilted up and over and began a flapping, black-smoke-plumed, slow return) *I know know know fer god sake keep yer guts know know an' that time in the hotel where we all was an' I got up in the night and gave her my wallet with the two hundred an' then she got up said she wanted to go to her room fer a minute and never came back to bed to me an' next morning Frank kiddin' the wop tellin' the wop he saw her come outa his room before breakfast an' the wop grinnin' and didn't care whether I'd heard or not an' nobody knew I only done the canary to-day an' I had to walk off like a god damn idiot an' I bet they were together an' saw it an' said an't he hot he released the parachute and it floated away and crumpled creamy-white in the bright yellow sunlight while he tumbled over and over ears buzzing with wind and his forefinger fumbling to find the second ripcord and he pulled and the jerk and he was swaying again as a pale roar rose, a thin column of sound with the massed crowd below as plinth *she thinks she's sure of the three hundred now not just seventy-five the dirty bitch go on you got the guts show her you got the guts go on go on go on go on* he released the second 'chute and shot hurtling down toward the rising mounds of hard earth *twenty-five hundred* while the roar of the crowd swelled, his arms wide, not searching for the third cord—but a corner of the last parachute was caught and plucked out by the rushing air as the earth moved terrifically upward and more and more of it followed and finally, just as the plunge ended, all.*

The billowing silk folded down lazily and widely over his shattered body, like a gigantic white shroud.



# Home-Coming

BY DAVID CORNEL DE JONG

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

## I

HER son's house was spacious, neat, precisely made, sturdy. In fact, it embodied all of Richard's best traits, thought old Mrs Farrow as she lowered herself, studiously careful, into the low chair. She was the first to enter the living-room, the only one who—for this evening at least—would be able to look upon the room's very accurate, slightly aloof hospitality unchastened by any other person's presence. In her opinion, the only slight objection there was to the room was that it did not seem homelike. It was like a waiting-room, a dentist's outer office, she told herself exactly—repeated it, for already her thoughts were shying off again toward the other. And she should not think of the other any longer. It was not necessary; it wasn't even healthy. She had done that all day, and there were still hours of waiting ahead of her before he came. Hours of idleness, she thought almost aloud, looking at her empty hands, folding her fingers loosely over each other.

Yes, like a dentist's office. But that was Ada's fault, and that one year of hers at the art school studying interior decorating. Not a thing in the room that lived, not a canary, not a goldfish, not even a picture worth a fig, only that plant at the window which was neither ivy nor fern, but which had the correct slant to its shape, no doubt, bent that way by Ada. She heard footsteps, her son's footsteps, and looked once more a little hopelessly at her hands.

The footsteps retreated again. For a while she still had to be alone, not thinking of what was in store for the evening. Pretty soon all their faces would be there, with all their thoughts written over them, almost in black and white. Perhaps it wasn't so strange that it was Ken, her favourite

grandson, who was causing all this trouble. But the novelists always made the black sheep the favourite of the grandmother also. No doubt she ran true to pattern, or they knew what they were writing about. That was a good idea to think about while she sat and waited. Ada was a nice girl, but arty and self-conscious, Reuben was too good, like a clock, annoying like an alarm clock, but Ken . . . Oh well, she shouldn't think of him. Not yet. But he was her favourite, she concluded hastily, as again her son's footsteps came closer.

Mr Farrow entered the room unfolding the evening newspaper. One could easily conceive that Mr Farrow had planned and built this house, especially this living-room. The straight blue eyes, the knotty hands, which had handled bricks and mortar, the unassuming clothes, the slightly lumbering gait—yes, Mr Farrow was the builder, a builder who had done well by himself.

Old Mrs Farrow spread out her empty hands and said, 'Here I sit, nothing in my hands. I guess I'm getting sort of lazy in my old age, Richard.' But when his face retained the same fixed, calculating rigidity, she added hastily, 'Yes, why don't you turn on the radio? I was going to, but I'd already sunk in this chair, and didn't have the courage to get up again.'

He looked at her vaguely. 'Are you all right there, Mother?'

'Sure. What's the matter with me?' she asked stridently.

'Nothing, if you say you're all right. You want the radio turned on, don't you?' He hunched down and fidgeted with the radio dial. 'Takes her mighty long to get heated up to-night,' he grumbled. Then, before sound came, he suddenly turned toward his mother. 'Do you think we ought to put it on to-night? Considering . . .'

'Sure. Why not?' she interpolated. 'We can't just sit here, all of us, all night looking at each other. Besides, why not have it on when he comes in? He isn't coming to a morgue, is he?' She was raising her voice impatiently above

the first strains of a dance orchestra 'Something lively,' she shouted

Mr Farrow turned to another dance orchestra and then lowered himself in a chair and spread the newspaper out in front of his face. The radio dominated until other footsteps came down the stairs. The old woman heard it was her granddaughter, Ada. When the girl stopped in the doorway, she appraised her somewhat hostilely, for already she imagined Ada's eyes sweeping over each article in the room trying to catch anything awry, anything not precisely harmonious. And because she imagined Ada thinking that the room should be especially neat and intimate to-night, so that the effect on Ken must be soothing, overwhelmingly soothing after two years in a cell, she slapped her hands on the arms of her chair and demanded, 'Ada, where's your mother? Now, she isn't sitting upstairs sobbing again, is she?' Her voice came unintentionally brusque and severe, as she had only intended to stop Ada's calculations.

'Mother isn't crying at all, Grandmother,' the girl protested somewhat petulantly. 'She'll be down in a moment.' After another minute's appraisal of the room she picked up a book and went to the davenport, first scowling indefinitely at the radio, then relaxing with her book. That artistically relaxed pose, the old lady thought grimly, and tried to listen to the radio, but Ada's mother's footsteps came down the stairway, thumping awkwardly on high hard heels. Better to have a good carpet on those stairs instead of Ada's notions, the old woman thought.

## II

Mrs Farrow stopped in the doorway also with a faint look of alarm toward the radio, next at her husband, then at the clock. 'Ten minutes of nine,' she said plaintively. 'Richard, you don't suppose he might come on the nine-o'clock train, do you?' She walked to the radio and turned it lower, her back carefully turned toward her mother-in-law.

Mr Farrow shook his paper impatiently. 'No. I told you before, no train comes in at nine. But you can never tell. Maybe he took a bus'

'Well, didn't you look up the bus schedules?'

'No.' He spread his paper grimly, excluding her.

'He isn't likely to take a bus. Imagine him going two hundred miles in a bus! Why, he never liked a bus.' Old Mrs Farrow had addressed herself directly to her daughter-in-law, piqued because the radio had been turned so low that the crackling of Richard's paper could easily drown it. Also, there was no necessity for that martyred look on her daughter's face.

'This is hardly the time to say anything about his likes and dislikes, Mother. I think he has other things to think about than whether he likes bus rides or not.' Never mentioning his name, never stating where he was coming from. That little game had been going on ever since they were certain of the day he was coming back. For the two years he had been there, they had never mentioned the place. A bit of realism might clear the sky quite a lot, the old woman thought sternly. But she sank back in her chair, also worrying about her grandson, no longer hearing the music. Perhaps it was easy for her to be correct and hard because she was old, she scolded herself, watching her daughter seat herself on a rocker with some sewing, studying her as she placed a neatly folded handkerchief carefully on one knee, ready to receive her tears. Old Mrs Farrow shut her eyes, listened to the dim music and street-car sounds, until thoughts came again.

When the thoughts had gone too far, she opened her eyes hastily, saw that handkerchief again and the hands of her daughter rhythmical over her sewing, her son's hands red and taut on the edges of the newspaper, Ada straight and dead-still with her book. All of them were pent, uneasy, desperately trying not to show their restiveness, each one at his worst, she thought. And she was seeing them all at their worst, because she had to contain herself. She fixed her eyes

on Ada's shoe, almost falling from a dangling foot. When that shoe fell, all this preciseness would be disturbed and the tension might break. But before it fell Ada put her foot into it more firmly. Old Mrs. Farrow sighed and looked at a large photograph of Reuben which was facing the door. That was the first time she had seen it there. That precise, adding-machine face, no wonder he did so well in the bank. No wonder. But that picture there, facing the door through which Kenneth was coming soon—that nettled her. If he would only come through the back door as he used to, that would be perfect. But he wouldn't. She leaned forward and demanded, 'Now, why, if you can't have pictures of real people in this room,' she paused abruptly to scowl a bit too ostentatiously at Rembrandt's Elizabeth Bas, until she saw that they were all listening, 'why must you have that picture of Reuben there?' It hasn't been there since Ada got back from art school, and there it is. Now why?' She addressed the last words to Ada, who had shut her book and looked with misgiving at Reuben's picture.

'But I didn't do it, Grandmother. You know I hate to see photographs about the house. And it isn't simply because Ken is . . .' She stopped suddenly and looked at her mother, whose fingers were crawling toward the handkerchief. 'Well, simply because photographs are out. They look terrible. Mother, did you put Reuben's picture there?' she demanded.

Even Mr. Farrow dropped his newspaper and leaned forward to get his wife's explanation. Mrs. Farrow's fingers retreated from the handkerchief and felt impotently for the needle. Somewhat bewildered, she looked at Reuben's photograph. 'I just put it there to-night, Ada. I thought, whereas Reuben can't be here with us to-night, when he—when Ken comes—well, I thought, anyway his picture is here. Sometimes I think that Reuben suffered more than any of us, what with his responsible position in the bank. It wasn't easy for him.'

The old woman thumped her fist impatiently on her chair.

Almost they had mentioned it, had been direct about him. But not enough 'Reuben hasn't suffered any more than the iceman,' she blurted out 'Now if you say that he's ashamed—more ashamed than the rest of us—well, then you're saying the truth I don't believe for one minute that he's got a meeting to-night He just didn't want to be here to see his brother come back' She clamped her mouth firmly shut when she felt them all staring at her

Even when her daughter's hands searched for the handkerchief again, she kept her mouth shut But when her son said, 'Why, Mother, what's the matter with you to-night?' in a voice that was altogether too soft for his big strong body, she sat back and smiled apologetically 'Maybe waiting's a bit too much for me,' she muttered.

## III

It didn't matter what they did after that—not even Ada's striding up to Reuben's photograph and carrying it off toward the back of the house Nothing. Not even three street cars passing, jarring the house sometimes, rattling things in the china closet, in spite of the house's sturdiness. She sat back and waited impatiently like the rest of them, wishing her fingers were busy with something

Mr Farrow finished his paper. It had been finished when he had brought it in All three watched him flick through the pages again Ada counting the seconds for each page on her watch, Mrs Farrow's hands going faster, the old lady's staring getting more intense until he had nearly reached the last page and she suddenly announced, 'It's hot in here Can't we open a window?'

Ada rose 'If we open this one at the front we can hear cars stop and people coming up the porch,' she said They all knew she had been meditating on that, in spite of the casualness of her voice.

'Yes, open that one Awful warm weather for October' Mr Farrow grumbled, and picked the newspaper up again, which he had allowed to crumple to the floor.

Ada leaned out of the open window. She straightened and looked only at her grandmother. 'Don't you think we could turn on the porch light?'

'No. Why should we? This is no bridge party,' her father answered at once.

'Well, I just thought . . .'

'Don't think. This isn't an occasion for foolishness. It's serious. You ought to realize that. It'll be serious for him, and it is for us.' After his diatribe he thrust the paper in front of his face again.

'Oh, all right,' Ada went back to her book and Mrs. Farrow's hands moved on again. Old Mrs. Farrow shut her eyes and listened to a far-away street-car jangle and the voices of children outdoors. Too late for children to be cavorting around. Then silence was long, endless, even Richard did not turn the pages of the newspaper any longer. He just sat behind them and stared. And then there came the sound of footsteps toward the house, up the porch steps, and all their hands were suddenly still on the things they were holding. The bell pealed. Mr. Farrow folded his paper and made preparations to rise. But then they heard voices, a woman's voice tittering in response to a man's. Mr. Farrow sagged back in his chair. 'You go, Ada, and see who's there,' he commanded.

Ada went reluctantly toward the door. 'Don't mince like that, Ada,' the old lady shouted before she too sank back in her chair, closing her eyes, careful that she hadn't looked at the clock first.

Ada returned after the sound of mutterings at the door. They had been unable to understand her vague protestations. With her entered a young couple, their faces screwed up politely, their eyes humble. Mr. Farrow did not rise. They all sat and stared. Ada remained standing behind the two, while the yellow-faced, watery-eyed young man explained. 'We heard that Kenneth was home. And as we're both such good friends of his, we thought we'd see how he was. But Ada says he hasn't come yet.'

'No,' said Mr. Farrow.

'But you expect him to-day, don't you, Mr. Farrow?' very cloyingly, very tenderly, as condolences for the stricken. The young woman's smiles wrinkled around her gold-rimmed glasses while she stuck her arm through that of her companion. No one had asked them to be seated. Ada hovered sternly behind them.

'Yes, we expect him to-night,' Mr. Farrow said, and started to search for his paper.

'Oh, well, in that case maybe we'd better run along. Tell him Brick and Anny came in to wish him lots of luck, will you? You know Anny, of course.'

'Sure, yes, come again when he's home,' Mr. Farrow mumbled, finally rising out of his chair, mainly because he had been unsuccessful in reaching his paper.

The two callers cast some smiles broadly into the room and appealed to Ada about this unusual October weather, groped toward the hallway again, where Ada was already holding the door open for them. Then their voices were outside once more; but not until Ada returned was the silence broken.

'If any more truck like that comes to-night, Ada, tell them we're all in bed. Anything,' Mr. Farrow fumed. 'Tell them anything, but don't let them in.'

'Well, why don't you go to the door, then, like you ought to? Maybe you can hold them out. I couldn't. They crowded as if we had a fire sale here,' she protested.

'Funny they didn't think of bringing a bag of peanuts to chew on while they watched the show. Wanting to see Kenneth! Only wanted to see how pasty he'd got, how humble after two years there. That's all. Well, he can't look pastier than that specimen. Call him Brick. Must be a brick of cheese.'

Old Mrs. Farrow leaned eagerly forward in approval. 'Never knew he was such a friend of Kenneth's. Ken wouldn't pick anything like that for a friend.'

But suddenly they lapsed into silence again, thinking of the friends Kenneth had chosen. Ada picked her book up



again after one despairing look at the clock. Mr. Farrow forgot his newspaper Mrs. Farrow, very intent on her sewing, said, 'Maybe, Richard, you should have driven down and fetched him You know it wouldn't have hurt '

'No,' he boomed 'He got himself in there without our help; he can find his way back to us without our making a show over it Just like those monkeys that just called First thing you know, you'll have him thinking he did something important No, he deserved every bit he got ' He rose and strode toward the kitchen, where they heard him splashing water noisily into the sink.

'Don't get him upset like that,' Ada scolded.

The old woman sat and blinked at the clock.

#### IV

For many long minutes nothing was said. Mr. Farrow returned to the room, seven street cars passed, the voices of children ended And then once again the doorbell rang, and none of them had heard footsteps or voices. No one rose after the ringing They simply sat and looked at the door until Mr. Farrow said at last, 'You look and see who's there, Ada.'

Again Ada cast a pleading glance back at them all—then especially toward her grandmother before she walked reluctantly toward the door when the bell rang a second time. 'Quit your mincing, Ada,' the old woman commanded desperately.

The voice which answered Ada's was not Ken's. It was a deep, assimilated bass, unctuous, measured. Ada's replies were almost audible—almost, because her uneasiness was making her shrill 'It's the preacher from John Street, where Ken used to play basketball,' Mrs. Farrow whispered, and pushed her sewing next to her on the chair.

Ada returned with the pastor, behind him as if she were shoving him in. He came, straight-backed, as if dutifully against his will, his face innocently florid, his eyeglasses

twinkling This time Mr Farrow rose and the grave hand-shaking started. Even old Mrs Farrow's hand lay for a while loose and unwilling in the preacher's, her old eyes telling him that after all she was compelled to do this, because people were silly enough to get that way about preachers, but that it was firmly against her particular, private will At least, she hoped that her eyes told him all that But when his hand cupped warm and long over hers, she withdrew hers unceremoniously He must be near-sighted, she thought grimly.

After the good-evenings came a discussion of the October weather, and then inevitably the sanctimonious voice turned more sanctimonious when it touched on Ken 'Yes, I heard that Kenneth would be home You know, of course, that he frequently wrote me letters Oh yes I have tried to be of as much guidance to him as I possibly could be Got in touch with the pastor there, who kept his eye on him Kenneth was a good boy, a little wild I had hoped I could have done more. But . . .' He hesitated, smiled benignantly, and looked at Mr. Farrow, expecting him to say something.

Mr. Farrow cleared his throat, but remained silent Mrs. Farrow said, 'Yes, we expect him to-night. Almost any time now, in fact. I am sure he'd be happy to see you.' Her voice sounded insincere in spite of her desperate politeness

'And, Miss Ada, I suppose you'll be very happy to have Kenneth back?' the pastor continued, his eyes already sweeping toward old Mrs. Farrow for his next remark

'Oh yes, of course,' Ada smiled fiercely .

Suddenly old Mrs Farrow lifted herself out of her chair with unaccustomed alacrity and scampered toward the back of the house 'I must see about the hot water,' she mumbled, and swept faster, fearing that his remarks might yet catch up with her

There was a long awkward silence then. The pastor rubbed his hands and once more made comments on the weather. Mr. Farrow offered him a cigar, already expecting the 'No, thank you I really never smoke, never crave for it.'

During another period of silence, Mr Farrow looked anxiously at the clock 'Yes, he may get here any moment,' he explained slowly. 'But then, also, maybe he won't get here till after midnight' He watched the effect of his words on the pastor's face Only one benign sympathetic nod was the answer. 'Well, you see—not suggesting anything, and all that—but you see, we'd like to meet Kenneth just with our own group to-night Just the family group. This is rather a different occasion You'll see, of course'

The pastor saw Even Mrs Farrow smiled piously, obviously in sympathy with her husband. The pastor rose, his smile frozen to a courteous good-will-to-all-men expression Of course, I understand, Mr Farrow It must be a little painful. But so much can be done with the right guidance. So very much And I do intend to help you, with all the strength God has given me Oh yes You must not protest I know it is one of my duties. Let's see, how old is Kenneth now?"

'Twenty-two,' Mrs. Farrow answered promptly, her ears cocked with misgiving toward the scouring sounds in the kitchen whither her mother-in-law had fled.

'Oh yes, twenty-two. Still a very pliable age I am certain that much can still be done with guidance Not that Kenneth is a really bad boy'

The farewells started Dead silence reigned in the kitchen. The old lady was no doubt contemplating a safe return, Ada thought Mr. Farrow went to the door with the pastor More words, soothing ones drifted back from there Old Mrs. Farrow returned from the kitchen 'I went and scoured that pan you baked the pudding in,' she announced Then, peering at the door, 'Had to do something—something noisy, so that I couldn't hear him'

## v

There had once more been a long silence 'Five of ten,' Mrs. Farrow said to end it, and studied her stitches critically.

Ada shut her book and lighted a cigarette Mr. Farrow frowned at her Then he too rose and selected a cigar. 'Seeing the preacher didn't want it, I might as well smoke it myself,' he explained 'Any other man would have accepted it So it would have been wasted anyway' He sat down and blew smoke rings Ada puffed assiduously at her cigarette; Mrs. Farrow coughed deprecatingly and nodded in the direction of the old lady, who had fallen asleep But at that moment she opened her eyes and protested, 'I suppose I've got to do better than this, if I want to see him with my own eyes'

Immediately thereafter a car stopped in front of the house Then another, and there were voices, among them Ken's, loud and cheerful They all rose in unison, even old Mrs Farrow, but none of them moved when the doorbell rang. Again Ada went to the door, when she saw that all the others hesitated Mrs. Farrow clutched her handkerchief.

They heard, 'Hi, Ada, old kid, how's sledding? Folks in?' Then Ada's answer, too low, perhaps because they were not listening to it. The door opened, and Kenneth in a new suit, pale but debonair, clean and smiling, waved his hands at them, while they remained staring, immobile, speechless. 'Hello, everybody! Hello there, Grandmom, how's the old scout?' He continued smiling, hesitating momentarily at their silence. 'Look here, I just ran in to tell you everything is O K. You see, the fellows—Eddie, Jim, and the bunch—drove all the way down and met me Awful decent of them. They knew you folks weren't coming, so they knew they wouldn't be butting in. I got these new togs downtown. How do you like them? He pirouetted in front of them while they looked dumbly at his neat grey suit. 'Not bad, is it? For a recent graduate? Well, as I was saying, the fellows got me, drove all the way' He stopped at the sounding of a peremptory automobile horn outside, turned and shouted through the open doorway, 'Hey there, Nan, hold your horses for a second, will you? Be with you in a minute.' He turned toward them again in the room, seemingly

oblivious of their staring 'I'm driving Just ached to get my fingers around a steering wheel again, so they let me. We had dinner downtown, and now we're going up to Eddie's to celebrate a little. Don't you worry about me. Thought I'd run in and let you know, so you wouldn't sit up all night.' He turned towards the door, and from the porch he shouted, 'I'll be seeing you when the roosters start crowing!'

## VI

They remained where they were and listened to a car door slamming shut and cars crunching away. No one moved to shut the door until Ada went to do this, and Mrs. Farrow sat down in her chair again and looked mechanically at the clock.

'He'd been drinking already,' Ada said, returning from the door.

'See you when the roosters crow,' Mr. Farrow mimicked bitterly. 'How do you like the new duds? Just like he'd just graduated from college instead of . . .' He stopped grimly.

'Instead of serving two years in prison,' Mrs. Farrow completed his sentence dryly.

Old Mrs. Farrow stood silent, pinching her fingers. At last they were mentioning the truth, wording and phrasing it accurately. And she did not like it. She did not want to hear it. 'Two years in jail for forging cheques and what not,' she added, to smother her own terrible disappointment and to prevent them from saying it.

'And look at his crowd. That Nan!' Ada complained and flung herself on the davenport.

'Two years, and we sit here expecting something—I don't know what. Just what did we expect? Anyway that he'd be sorry and meek, anxious to be back, promising things' Mr. Farrow chewed his cigar ferociously.

'You should have gone and gotten him. You had nothing to do all day,' Mrs. Farrow complained.

'Get that good-for-nothing? Go two hundred miles for

that? I'm damned glad I didn't stir from the house. Was never so glad in all my life. I should have faked up a meeting too, like Reuben. I guess Reuben had him spotted all right.'

'There, I knew Reuben had no meeting,' the old lady grumbled. 'I knew it. The prude.' She lowered herself in her chair again. They all followed her example. When she saw that they were all seated she concluded, 'Well, that's that, I guess.'

They sat listening to the radio, which Ada had impetuously turned higher. The truth had been spoken, the unmentionable had been mentioned, and the truth was worse than silence and lies. They looked at each other guiltily. Ada started another cigarette. Facing and naming the truth had demoralized them, no matter how often they had turned it over in their own minds. The stating of it before others—family members even—had done it, completely demoralized them. But Kenneth had done that, they accused and palliated at the same time. Mr Farrow rose. 'If a son, after serving two years, can go and celebrate, well, what's the matter with us?' he challenged. 'Why should we sit here in the dumps? That's what I'd like to know. How about us all having a good helping of that dandelion wine that set us on our ears a couple of Sundays ago? We'll show them what we can do!' he shouted defiantly, and strode toward the cellar.

They heard him clanging bottles. The three women did not look at each other. Ada said, 'That's the spirit anyway, even though I don't like dandelion wine. We might get some good stuff for the occasion.'

'Who'd ever have thought this would be the way for the evening to end,' Mrs Farrow said, and rose to get glasses. 'Come here, Ada, and help me,' she called from the kitchen.

Old Mrs Farrow folded her hands. Thinking was done. Everything was done. No more worrying. Let the dead bury their dead. Let the prisoner shape himself another prison. Good boy, though, Kenneth. Too much life and too much spirit, therefore no good. She could count the street cars passing, louder and fewer now. Go ahead and avoid the

truth again, the truth of their disappointment. That was necessary. She would help them. She rose wearily from her chair and banged the window shut. Whoever might come could stay outside.

## VII

Mr. Farrow entered with the wine. He poured, they toasted and drank, not mentioning Kenneth again—avoiding Kenneth so assiduously that everything they mentioned was an avoidance of him. The wine was pungent and heady and the room grew hot and dense, for Mr. Farrow smoked furiously and Ada lit one cigarette after another. The weather was too warm for the time of the year, they concluded. The business depression was bound to continue, no building going on, Mr. Farrow complained. They were all heading for ruin. But that again touched on Kenneth. Must write to Mildred, Mrs. Farrow mentioned, but how to write to one's own sister and not say anything about Kenneth! They listened to the radio, they laughed, they had more wine. And because they had totally forgotten Reuben, they sat startled, each one holding his glass, when they heard his key in the lock.

Reuben entered and stopped. They stared at him as they had done at Kenneth, forgetting to reply to his good-evening. They noted his surprised glaring at their glasses and at the smoke-filled room. They were aware of his neatness, his correctness, his fierce unassumingness, as he stood there, immaculate, unhandsome, stiff and rigid like the crease in his trousers. He stood and waited for them to speak, wondering and disapproving of the half-emptied glasses. 'Well, I guess this is a surprise,' he said at last.

'Yes, it's a surprise,' Mrs. Farrow answered vaguely.

Still he did not come nearer, but remained standing with his topcoat over his arm. Only men like Reuben would wear a topcoat on warm evenings like this one, simply because the calendar said it was October, they thought. 'What's the big occasion?' he asked, desperately jovial.

They did not answer, but when Ada sipped from her glass they all followed her example

He coloured and threw his coat on a chair 'I guess it is a secret If it wasn't so funny, if it wasn't so close to the old story of the prodigal son's return and his older brother not liking it, I would laugh. I wouldn't mention it. But it's so close, why, it looks as if you're playing the part' Unwittingly he was assuming the role they had all imagined for him as they sat there staring at him censoriously looking at their drinking.

'Have a drink, Reuben?' Mr Farrow suggested

'No' He snapped his lips shut, and thrust his hands in his pockets 'Where is he?' he demanded 'Where are you hiding him?'

'He's gone to bed He went to bed right away,' Mrs. Farrow said, so easily that none of them glanced up in surprise

'He rode the bus all day. He was awful tired,' Ada added.

'Yes, we thought he'd better get a good night's rest,' Mr. Farrow said.

The old lady smiled a little triumphantly, her heart suddenly light She sipped from her glass. 'Poor boy,' she muttered. 'He was so ashamed of himself Tired, too. And I guess he was ashamed of meeting you, Reuben—you more than any of us.' She felt warm, beautiful, protecting Kenneth—helping all of them against Reuben, spinning out lies so beautifully around him that they were smothering him.

Reuben smiled wryly. 'How did he look?' he asked.

'Pale,' Mr. Farrow said. 'He looks worn-out Had very little to say.'

'Yes, I put him in the guest-room. He's sleeping You'd better not disturb him And I told him he'd better sleep late to-morrow Maybe you won't get to see him till to-morrow night,' Mrs Farrow told him with all the semblance of truth and concern.

The old lady had risen and pulled at Ada's dress 'The guest-room door,' she whispered, while Mr. Farrow said



mournfully, 'Yes, that is too bad. You won't get to see him. It's too bad, Reuben, but maybe you don't mind.'

Ada clattered up the bare stairway. 'No. I guess tomorrow is all right,' Reuben said and sat down. 'So he took it pretty hard, did he?'

They nodded. 'Now, won't you have a drink, too?' Mrs. Farrow urged

'No, I guess not. I don't like it. Guess I'll turn in myself. I am tired, too. Work the whole day and then his meeting to-night—that is pretty tiring.' Reuben stroked his temples wearily

Again Ada's footsteps came thumping down the stairs. Ada makes altogether too much noise, altogether too much. She'll wake him up yet. I always told her, with her silly notions, that there ought to be a carpet over it'

Old Mrs. Farrow almost believed that she was protecting Kenneth against Ada's noisy thumping. Perhaps the wine hid it. Perhaps untruth was far better than truth, if only to soothe herself. Anything against Reuben, in deep, vast unity with them all against Reuben. Age didn't matter and truth didn't matter. 'Ada, I'm sure you woke him up with all your thumping,' she said angrily when the girl came back in the room

Slowly they all sipped from their glasses and watched Reuben with ill-concealed hostility as he continued stroking his forehead in assumed weariness. 'You'd better go to bed,' the old woman said. 'But don't you go thumping up the stairs.'

## *Lo !*

BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

(From *Story*)

THE President stood motionless at the door of the Dressing Room, fully dressed save for his boots. It was half-past six in the morning and it was snowing, already he had stood for an hour at the window, watching the snow. Now he stood just inside the door to the corridor, utterly motionless in his stockings, stooped a little from his lean height as though listening, on his face an expression of humourless concern, since humour had departed from his situation and his view of it almost three weeks before. Hanging from his hand, low against his flank, was a hand mirror of elegant French design, such as should have been lying upon a lady's dressing-table certainly at this hour of a February day.

At last he put his hand on the knob and opened the door infinitesimally; beneath his hand the door crept by inches and without any sound, still with that infinitesimal silence he put his eye to the crack and saw, lying upon the deep, rich pile of the corridor carpet, a bone. It was a cooked bone, a rib; to it still adhered close shreds of flesh holding in mute and overlapping half-moons the marks of human teeth. Now that the door was open he could hear the voices too. Still without any sound, with that infinite care, he raised and advanced the mirror. For an instant he caught his own reflection in it and he paused for a time and with a kind of cold unbelief he examined his own face—the face of the shrewd and courageous fighter, of that well-nigh infallible expert in the anticipation of and controlling of man and his doings, overlaid now with the baffled helplessness of a child. Then he slanted the glass a little further until he could see the corridor reflected in it. Squatting and facing one another across the carpet as across a stream of water were two men. He did not know the faces, though he knew the Face, since he had looked upon it by day and dreamed upon

it by night for three weeks now. It was a squat face, dark, a little flat, a little Mongol; secret, decorous, impenetrable, and grave. He had seen it repeated until he had given up trying to count it or even estimate it; even now, though he could see the two men squatting before him and could hear the two quiet voices, it seemed to him that in some idiotic moment out of attenuated sleeplessness and strain he looked upon a single man facing himself in a mirror.

They wore beaver hats and new frock coats; save for the minor detail of collars and waistcoats they were impeccably dressed—though a little early—for the forenoon of the time, down to the waist. But from here down credulity, all sense of fitness and decorum, was outraged. At a glance one would have said that they had come intact out of Pickwickian England, save that the tight, light-coloured small-clothes ended not in Hessian boots nor in any boots at all, but in dark, naked feet. On the floor beside each one lay a neatly rolled bundle of dark cloth; beside each bundle in turn, mute toe and toe and heel and heel, as though occupied by invisible sentries facing one another across the corridor, sat two pairs of new boots. From a basket woven of white-oak withes beside one of the squatting men there shot suddenly the snake-like head and neck of a game cock, which glared at the faint flash of the mirror with a round, yellow, outraged eye. It was from these that the voices came, pleasant, decorous, quiet:

‘That rooster hasn’t done you much good up here.’

‘That’s true. Still, who knows? Besides, I certainly couldn’t have left him at home, with those damned lazy Indians. I wouldn’t find a feather left. You know that. But it is a nuisance, having to lug this cage around with me day and night.’

‘This whole business is a nuisance, if you ask me.’

‘You said it. Squatting here outside this door all night long, without a gun or anything. Suppose bad men tried to get in during the night—what could we do? If anyone would want to get in—I don’t.’

'Nobody does. It's for honour.'

'Whose honour? Yours? Mine? Frank Weddel's?'

'White man's honour You don't understand white people They are like children. you have to handle them careful because you never know what they are going to do next. So if it's the rule for guests to squat all night long in the cold outside this man's door, we'll just have to do it Besides, hadn't you rather be in here than out yonder in the snow in one of those damn tents?'

'You said it. What a climate! What a country! I wouldn't have this town if they gave it to me'

'Of course you wouldn't But that's white men: no accounting for taste So as long as we are here, we'll have to try to act like these people believe that Indians ought to act. Because you never know until afterward just what you have done to insult or scare them. Like this having to talk white talk all the time . . .'

The President withdrew the mirror and closed the door quietly. Once more he stood silent and motionless in the middle of the room, his head bent, musing, baffled yet indomitable indomitable since this was not the first time that he had faced odds, baffled since he faced not an enemy in the open field, but was besieged within his very high and lonely office by them to whom he was, by legal if not divine appointment, father. In the iron silence of the winter dawn he seemed, clairvoyant of walls, to be ubiquitous and one with the waking of the stately House Invisible and in a kind of musing horror he seemed to be of each group of his Southern guests—that one squatting without the door, that larger one like so many figures carved of stone in the very rotunda itself of this concrete and visible apotheosis of the youthful Nation's pride—in their new beavers and frock coats and woollen drawers. With their neatly rolled pantaloons under their arms and their virgin shoes in the other hand, dark, timeless, decorous and serene beneath the astonished faces and golden braid, the swords and ribbons and stars, of European diplomats

The President said quietly, 'Damn. Damn. Damn.' He moved and crossed the room, pausing to take up his boots from where they sat beside a chair, and approached the opposite door. Again he paused and opened this door too quietly and carefully, out of the three weeks' habit of expectant fatalism, though there was only his wife beyond it, sleeping peacefully in bed. He crossed this room in turn, carrying his boots, pausing to replace the hand glass on the dressing-table, among its companion pieces of the set which the new French Republic had presented to a predecessor, and tiptoed on and into the ante-room, where a man in a long cloak looked up and then rose, also in his stockings. They looked at one another soberly 'All clear?' the President said in a low tone

'Yes, General.'

'Good. Did you . . .' The other produced a second long, plain cloak. 'Good, good,' the President said. He swung the cloak about him before the other could move. 'Now the . . .' This time the other anticipated him; the President drew the hat well down over his face. They left the room on tiptoe, carrying their boots in their hands

The back stairway was cold; their stockinged toes curled away from the treads, their vaporized breath wisped about their heads. They descended quietly and sat on the bottom step and put on their boots

Outside it still snowed; invisible against snow-coloured sky and snow-coloured earth, the flakes seemed to materialize with violent and silent abruptness against the dark orifice of the stables. Each bush and shrub resembled a white balloon whose dark shroud lines descended, light and immobile, to the white earth. Interspersed among these in turn and with a certain regularity were a dozen vaguely tent-shaped mounds, from the ridge of each of which a small column of smoke rose into the windless snow, as if the snow itself were in a state of peaceful combustion. The President looked at these, once, grimly. 'Get along,' he said. The other, his head lowered and his cloak held closely about his

face, scuttled on and ducked into the stable. Perish the day when these two words were applied to the soldier chief of a party and a nation, yet the President was so close behind him that their breaths made one cloud. And perish the day when the word *flight* were so applied, yet they had hardly vanished into the stable when they emerged, mounted now and already at a canter, and so across the lawn and past the snow-hidden tents and toward the gates which gave upon that Avenue in embryo yet but which in time would be the stage upon which each four years would parade the proud panoply of the young Nation's lusty man's estate for the admiration and envy and astonishment of the weary world. At the moment, though, the gates were occupied by those more immediate than splendid augurs of the future.

'Look out,' the other man said, reining back. They reined aside—the President drew the cloak about his face—and allowed the party to enter. the squat, broad, dark men dark against the snow, the beaver hats, the formal coats, the solid legs clad from thigh to ankle in woollen drawers. Among them moved three horses on whose backs were lashed the carcasses of six deer. They passed on, passing the two horsemen without a glance.

'Damn, damn, damn,' the President said; then aloud 'You found good hunting.'

One of the group glanced at him, briefly. He said courteously, pleasantly, without inflection, going on 'So so.'

The horses moved again. 'I didn't see any guns,' the other man said.

'Yes,' the President said grimly. 'I must look into this, too. I gave strict orders . . .' He said fretfully, 'Damn. Damn. Do they carry their pantaloons when they go hunting too, do you know?'

The Secretary was at breakfast, though he was not eating. Surrounded by untasted dishes he sat, in his dressing-gown and unshaven, his expression too was harried as he perused the paper which lay upon his empty plate. Before the fire

were two men—one a horseman with unmelted snow still upon his cloak, seated on a wooden settle, the other standing, obviously the secretary to the Secretary. The horseman rose as the President and his companion entered. 'Sit down, sit down,' the President said. He approached the table, slipping off the cloak, which the secretary came forward and took. 'Give us some breakfast,' the President said. 'We don't dare go home.' He sat down, the Secretary served him in person. 'What is it now?' the President said.

'Do you ask?' the Secretary said. He took up the paper again and glared at it. 'From Pennsylvania, this time.' He struck the paper. 'Maryland, New York, and now Pennsylvania, apparently the only thing that can stop them is the temperature of the water in the Potomac River.' He spoke in a harsh, nascent voice. 'Complaint, complaint, complaint. here is a farmer near Gettysburg. His Negro slave was in the barn, milking by lantern light after dark, when—the Negro doubtless thought about two hundred, since the farmer estimated them at ten or twelve—sprang suddenly out of the darkness in plug hats and carrying knives and naked from the waist down. Result, item One barn and loft of hay and cow destroyed when the lantern was kicked over; item one able-bodied slave last seen departing from the scene at a high rate of speed, headed for the forest, and doubtless now dead of fear or by the agency of wild beasts. Debit the Government of the United States: for barn and hay, one hundred dollars; for cow, fifteen dollars; for Negro slave, two hundred dollars. He demands it in gold.'

'Is that so?' the President said, eating swiftly. 'I suppose the Negro and the cow took them to be ghosts of Hessian soldiers.'

'I wonder if they thought the cow was a deer,' the horseman said.

'Yes,' the President said. 'That's something else I want . . .'

'Who wouldn't take them for anything on earth or under it?' the Secretary said. 'The entire Atlantic seaboard north of the Potomac River over-run by creatures in beaver hats

and frock coats and woollen drawers, frightening women and children, setting fire to barns and running off slaves, killing deer. . . '

'Yes,' the President said. 'I want to say a word about that, myself. I met a party of them returning as I came out. They had six deer. I thought I gave strict orders that they were not to be permitted guns.'

Again it was the horseman who spoke. 'They don't use guns.'

'What?' the President said 'But I saw myself. '

'No, sir. They use knives. They track the deer down and slip up on them and cut their throats.'

'What?' the President said

'All right, sir. I seen one of the deer. It never had a mark on it except its throat cut up to the neckbone with one lick.'

Again the President said, 'Damn. Damn. Damn.' Then the President ceased and the Soldier cursed steadily for a while. The others listened, gravely, their faces carefully averted, save the Secretary who had taken up another paper. 'If you could just persuade them to keep their pantaloons on,' the President said 'At least about the House . . . '

The Secretary started back, his hair upcrested like an outraged, iron-grey cockatoo 'I, sir? I persuade them?'

'Why not? Aren't they subject to your Department? I'm just the President. Confound it, it's got to where my wife no longer dares leave her bedroom, let alone receive lady guests. How am I to explain to the French Ambassador, for instance, why his wife no longer dares call upon my wife because the corridors and the very entrance to the House are blocked by half-naked Chickasaw Indians asleep on the floor or gnawing at half-raw ribs of meat? And I, myself, having to hide away from my own table and beg breakfast, while the official representative of the government has nothing to do but . . . '

'... but explain again each morning to the Treasury,' the Secretary said in shrill rage, 'why another Dutch farmer in Pennsylvania or New York must have three hundred dollars in gold in payment for the destruction of his farm



and livestock, and explain to the State Department that the capital is not being besieged by demons from hell itself, and explain to the War Department why twelve brand new army tents must be ventilated at the top with butcher knives. . . '

'I noticed that, too,' the President said mildly 'I had forgot it.'

'Ha. Your Excellency noted it,' the Secretary said fiercely. 'Your Excellency saw it and then forgot it. I have neither seen it nor been permitted to forget it. And now Your Excellency wonders why *I* do not persuade them to wear their pantaloons'

'It does seem like they would,' the President said fretfully. 'The other garments seem to please them well enough. But there's no accounting for taste.' He ate again. The Secretary looked at him, about to speak. Then he did not. As he watched the oblivious President a curious, secret expression came into his face, his grey and white crest settled slowly, as if it were deflating itself. When he spoke now his tone was bland, smooth; now the other three men were watching the President with curious, covert expressions.

'Yes,' the Secretary said, 'there's no accounting for taste. Though it does seem that when one has been presented with a costume as a mark of both honour and esteem, let alone decorum, and by the chief of a well, tribe . . .'

'That's what I thought,' the President said innocently. Then he ceased chewing and said 'Eh?' sharply, looking up. The three lesser men looked quickly away, but the Secretary continued to watch the President with that bland, secret expression. 'What the devil do you mean?' the President said. He knew what the Secretary meant, just as the other three knew. A day or two after his guest had arrived without warning, and after the original shock had somewhat abated, the President had decreed the new clothing for them. He commanded, out of his own pocket, merchants and hatters as he would have commanded gunsmiths and bullet-makers in war emergency; incidentally he was thus able to estimate the number of them, the men at least, and within forty-eight

hours he had transformed his guest's grave and motley train into the outward aspect of decorum at least. Then, two mornings after that, the guest—the half Chickasaw, half Frenchman, the squat, obese man with the face of a Gascon brigand and the mannerisms of a spoiled eunuch and dingy lace at throat and wrist, who for three weeks now had dogged his waking hours and his sleeping dreams with bland inescapability—called formally upon him while he and his wife were still in bed at five o'clock in the morning, with two of his retainers carrying a bundle and what seemed to the President at least a hundred others, men, women and children, thronging quietly into the bedroom, apparently to watch him array himself in it. For it was a costume—even in the shocked horror of the moment, the President found time to wonder wildly where in the capital Weddel (or Vidal) had found it—a mass, a network, of gold braid—frogs, epaulets, sash and sword—held loosely together by bright green cloth and presented to him in return. This is what the Secretary meant, while the President glared at him and while behind them both the three other men stood looking at the fire with immobile gravity. 'Have your joke,' the President said. 'Have it quickly. Are you done laughing now?'

'I laugh?' the Secretary said. 'At what?'

'Good,' the President said. He thrust the dishes from him. 'Then we can get down to business. Have you any documents you will need to refer to?'

The Secretary's secretary approached. 'Shall I get the other papers, sir?'

'Papers?' the Secretary said; once more his chest began to rise. 'What the devil do I need with papers? What else have I thought about night and day for three weeks?'

'Good; good,' the President said. 'Suppose you review the matter briefly, in case I have forgotten anything else.'

'Your Excellency is indeed a fortunate man, if you have been able to forget,' the Secretary said. From the pocket of his dressing-gown he took a pair of steel-bowed spectacles. But he used them merely to glare again at the President.

in cockatoo-crested outrage 'This man, Weddel, Vidal—whatever his name is—he and his family or clan or whatever they are—claim to own the entire part of Mississippi which lies on the west side of this river in question. Oh, the grant is in order—that French father of his from New Orleans saw to that—Well, it so happens that facing his home or plantation is the only ford in about three hundred miles.'

'I know all this,' the President said impatiently 'Naturally I regret now that there was any way of crossing the river at all. But otherwise I don't see . . .'

'Neither did they,' the Secretary said 'Until the white man came.'

'Ah,' the President said 'The man who was murdered . . .'

The Secretary raised his hand 'Wait. He stayed about a month with them, ostensibly hunting, since he would be absent all day long, though obviously what he was doing was assuring himself that there was no other ford close by. He never brought any game in; I imagine they laughed at that a good deal, in their pleasant way.'

'Yes,' the President said 'Weddel must have found that very amusing.'

' . . . or Vidal—whatever his name is,' the Secretary said fretfully 'He don't even seem to know or even to care what his own name is.'

'Get on,' the President said 'About the ford.'

'Yes. Then one day, after a month, the white man offered to buy some of Weddel's land—Weddel, Vidal—Damn, da . . .'

'Call him Weddel,' the President said.

' . . . from Weddel. Not much; a piece about the size of this room, for which Weddel or V— charged him about ten pices. Not out of any desire for usufruct, you understand, doubtless Weddel would have given the man the land or anyway wagered it on a game of mumble peg, it not having yet occurred to any of them apparently that the small plot which the man wanted contained the only available entrance to or exit from the ford. Doubtless the trading protracted

itself over several days or perhaps weeks, as a kind of game to while away otherwise idle afternoons or evenings, with the bystanders laughing heartily and pleasantly at the happy scene. They must have laughed a great deal, especially when the man paid Weddel's price; they must have laughed hugely indeed later when they watched the white man out in the sun, building a fence around his property, it doubtless not even then occurring to them that what the white man had done was to fence off the only entrance to the ford.

'Yes,' the President said impatiently. 'But I still don't see . . .'

Again the Secretary lifted his hand, pontifical, admonitory. 'Neither did they; not until the first traveller came along and crossed at the ford. The white man had built himself a tollgate.'

'Oh,' the President said.

'Yes. And now it must have been, indeed, amusing for them to watch the white man sitting now in the shade—he had a deerskin pouch fastened to a post for the travellers to drop their coins in, and the gate itself arranged so he could operate it by a rope from the veranda of his one room domicile without having even to leave his seat, and to begin to acquire property—among which was the horse.'

'Ah,' the President said. 'Now we are getting at it.'

'Yes. They got at it swiftly from then on. It seems that the match was between the white man's horse and this nephew's horse, the wager the ford and tollgate against a thousand or so acres of land. The nephew's horse lost. And that night . . .'

'Ah,' the President said. 'I see. And that night the white man was murdered . . .'

'Let us say, died,' the Secretary said primly, 'since it is so phrased in the agent's report. Though he did add in a private communication that the white man's disease seemed to be a split skull. But that is neither here nor there.'

'No,' the President said. 'It's up yonder at the House.' Where they had been for three weeks now, men, women,

children and Negro slaves, coming for fifteen hundred miles in slow wagons since that day in late autumn when the Chickasaw agent had appeared to inquire into the white man's death. For fifteen hundred miles, across winter swamps and rivers, across the trackless eastern backbone of the continent, led by the bland, obese mongrel despot and patriarch in a carriage, dozing, his nephew beside him and one fat, ringed hand beneath its fall of soiled lace lying upon the nephew's knee to hold him in charge. 'Why didn't the agent stop him?' the President said.

'Stop him?' the Secretary cried. 'He finally compromised to the extent of offering to allow the nephew to be tried on the spot, by the Indians themselves, he reserving only the intention of abolishing the tollgate, since no one knew the white man anyway. But no. The nephew must come to you, to be absolved or convicted in person.'

'But couldn't the agent stop the rest of them? Keep the rest of them from . . .'

'Stop them?' the Secretary cried again. 'Listen. He moved in there and lived—Weddel, Vi—Damn! damn!! Where was—Yes. Weddel told him that the house was his; soon it was. Because how could he tell there were fewer faces present each morning than the night before? Could you have? Could you now?'

'I wouldn't try,' the President said. 'I would just declare a national thanksgiving. So they slipped away at night.'

'Yes. Weddel and the carriage and a few forage wagons went first; they had been gone about a month before the agent realized that each morning the number which remained had diminished somewhat. They would load the wagons and go at night, by families—grandparents, parents, children; slaves, chattels and dogs—everything. And why not? Why should they deny themselves this holiday at the expense of the Government? Why should they miss, at the mere price of a fifteen-hundred-mile journey through unknown country in the dead of winter, the privilege and pleasure of spending a few weeks or months in new beavers and broadcloth coats

and under-drawers, in the home of the beneficent White Father?"

'Yes,' the President said. He said 'And you have told him that there is no charge here against this nephew?'

'Yes. And that if they will go back home, the agent himself will declare the nephew innocent publicly, in whatever ceremony they think fit. And he said—how was it he put it?' The Secretary now spoke in a pleasant, almost lilting tone, in almost exact imitation of the man whom he repeated 'All we desire is justice. If this foolish boy has murdered a white man, I think that we should know it.'

'Damn, damn, damn,' the President said. 'All right. We'll hold the investigation. Get them down here and let's have it over with.'

'Here?' The Secretary started back. 'In my house?'

'Why not? I've had them for three weeks, at least you can have them for an hour.' He turned to the companion. 'Hurry. Tell them we are waiting here to hold his nephew's trial.'

And now the President and the Secretary sat behind the cleared table and looked at the man who stood as though framed by the opened doors through which he had entered, holding his nephew by the hand like an uncle conducting for the first time a youthful provincial kinsman into a metropolitan museum of wax figures. Immobile, they contemplated the soft, paunchy man facing them with his soft, bland, inscrutable face—the long, monk-like nose, the slumberous lids, the flabby, *café-au-lait* coloured jowls above a froth of soiled lace of an elegance fifty years outmoded and vanished, the mouth was full, small, and very red. Yet somewhere behind the face's expression of flaccid and weary disillusion, as behind the bland voice and the almost feminine mannerisms, there lurked something else something wilful, shrewd, unpredictable and despotic. Behind him clotted, quiet and gravely decorous, his dark retinue in beavers and broadcloth and woollen drawers, each with his neatly rolled pantaloons beneath his arm.

For a moment longer he stood, looking from face to face, until he found the President. He said, in a voice of soft approach 'This is not your house.'

'No,' the President said 'This is the house of this chief whom I have appointed myself to be the holder of justice between me and my Indian people. He will deal justice to you.'

The uncle bowed slightly 'That is all that we desire.'

'Good,' the President said. On the table before him sat inkstand, quill, and sandbox, and many papers with ribbons and golden seals much in evidence, though none could have said if the heavy gaze had remarked them or not. The President looked at the nephew. Young, lean, the nephew stood, his right wrist clasped by his uncle's fat, lace-foamed hand, and contemplated the President quietly, with grave and alert repose. The President dipped the quill into the ink 'Is this the man who . . .'

'Who performed this murder?' the uncle said pleasantly. That is what we made this long winter's journey to discover. If he did, if this white man really did not fall from that swift noise of his perhaps and strike his head upon a sharp stone, then this nephew of mine should be punished. We do not think that it is right to slay white men like a confounded Cherokee or Creek.' Perfectly inscrutable, perfectly decorous, he looked at the two exalted personages playing behind the table their clumsy deception with dummy papers; for an instant the President himself met the slumberous eyes and looked down. The secretary though, upthrust, his crest reached violently upward, glared at the uncle.

'You should have held this horse-race across the ford self,' he said. 'Water wouldn't have left that gash in the white man's skull.'

The President, glancing quickly up, saw the heavy, secret face musing upon the Secretary with dark speculation. But almost immediately the uncle spoke. 'So it would. But this white man would have doubtless required a coin of money from my nephew for passing through his gate.' Then

he laughed, mirthful, pleasant, decorous 'Perhaps it would have been better for that white man if he had allowed my nephew to pass through free. But that is neither here nor there now'

'No,' the President said, almost sharply, so that they looked at him again. He held the quill above the paper. 'What is the correct name? Weddel or Vidal?'

Again the pleasant, inflectionless voice came: 'Weddel or Vidal. What does it matter by what name the White Chief calls us? We are but Indians: remembered yesterday and forgotten to-morrow.'

The President wrote upon the paper. The quill scratched steadily in the silence in which there was but one other sound: a faint, steady, minor sound which seemed to emerge from the dark and motionless group behind the uncle and nephew. He sanded what he had written and folded it and rose and stood for a moment so while they watched quietly—the soldier who had commanded men well on more occasions than this. 'Your nephew is not guilty of this murder. My chief whom I have appointed to hold justice between us says for him to return home and never do this again, because next time he will be displeased'

His voice died into a shocked silence; even for that instant the heavy lids fluttered, while from the dark throng behind him that faint, unceasing sound of quiet scratching by heat and wool engendered, like a faint, constant motion of the sea, also ceased for an instant. The uncle spoke in a tone of shocked unbelief: 'My nephew is free?'

'He is free,' the President said. The uncle's shocked gaze travelled about the room.

'This quick? And in here? In this house? I had thought. . . . But no matter.' They watched him; again the face was smooth, enigmatic, blank. 'We are only Indians; doubtless these busy white men have but little time for our small affairs. Perhaps we have already incommoded them too much.'

'No, no,' the President said quickly. 'To me, my Indian and my white people are the same' But again the uncle's



gaze was travelling quietly about the room; standing side by side, the President and the Secretary could feel from one to another the same dawning alarm. After a while the President said 'Where had you expected this council to be held?'

The uncle looked at him 'You will be amused. In my ignorance I had thought that even our little affair would have been concluded in . But no matter.'

'In what?' the President said.

The bland, heavy face mused again upon him for a moment. 'You will laugh; nevertheless, I will obey you. In the big white council house beneath the golden eagle.'

'What?' the Secretary cried, starting again 'In the . . .'

The uncle looked away 'I said that you would be amused. But no matter We will have to wait, anyway'

'Have to wait?' the President said. 'For what?'

'This is really amusing,' the uncle said. He laughed again, in his tone of mirthful detachment 'More of my people are about to arrive We can wait for them, since they will wish to see and hear also' No one exclaimed at all now, not even the Secretary They merely stared at him while the bland voice went on 'It seems that some of them mistook the town. They had heard the name of the White Chief's capital spoken, but it so happens that there is also a town in our country with the same name, so that when some of the People inquired on the road, they became misdirected and went there instead, poor ignorant Indians.' He laughed, with fond and mirthful tolerance behind his enigmatic and sleepy face 'But a messenger has arrived; they will arrive themselves within the week Then we will see about punishing this headstrong boy.' He shook the nephew's arm lightly. Except for this the nephew did not move, watching the President with his grave and unwinking regard

For a long moment there was no sound save the faint, steady scratching of the Indians Then the Secretary began to speak, patiently, as though addressing a child: 'Look Your nephew is free. This paper says that he did not slay

the white man and that no man shall so accuse him again, else both I and the great chief beside me will be angered. He can return home now, at once. Let all of you return home at once. For is it not well said that the graves of a man's fathers are never quiet in his absence?"

Again there was silence. Then the President said, 'Besides, the white council house beneath the golden eagle is being used now by a council of chiefs who are more powerful there than I am.'

The uncle's hand lifted, foamed with soiled lace, his forefinger waggled in reproachful deprecation. 'Do not ask even an ignorant Indian to believe that,' he said. Then he said, with no change of inflection whatever; the Secretary did not know until the President told him later, that the uncle was now addressing him: 'And these chiefs will doubtless be occupying the white council hut for some time yet, I suppose.'

'Yes,' the Secretary said. 'Until the last snow of winter has melted among the flowers and the green grass.'

'Good,' the uncle said. 'We will wait, then. Then the rest of the People will have time to arrive.'

And so it was that up that Avenue with a high destiny the cavalcade moved in the still falling snow, led by the carriage containing the President and the uncle and nephew, the fat, ringed hand lying again upon the nephew's knee, and followed by a second carriage containing the Secretary and his secretary, and this followed in turn by two files of soldiers between which walked the dark and decorous cloud of men, women and children on foot and in arms, so it was that behind the Speaker's desk of that chamber which was to womb and contemplate the high dream of a destiny superior to the injustice of events and the folly of mankind, the President and the Secretary stood, while below them, ringed about by the living manipulators of, and interspersed by the august and watching ghosts of the dreamers of, the destiny, the uncle and nephew stood, with behind them the dark throng of kin and friends and acquaintances from among

which came steadily and unabated that faint sound of wool and flesh in friction. The President leaned to the Secretary.

'Are they ready with the cannon?' he whispered. 'Are you sure they can see my arm from the door? And suppose those damned guns explode they have not been fired since Washington shot them last at Cornwallis. will they impeach me?'

'Yes,' the Secretary hissed

'Then God help us. Give me the book.' The Secretary passed it to him. It was Petrarch's Sonnets, which the Secretary had snatched from his table in passing. 'Let us hope that I remember enough law Latin to keep it from sounding like either English or Chickasaw,' the President said. He opened the book, and then again the President, the conqueror of men, the winner of battles diplomatic, legal and martial, drew himself erect and looked down upon the dark, still, intent, waiting faces; when he spoke his voice was the voice which before this had caused men to pause and attend and then obey. 'Francis Weddel, chief in the Chickasaw Nation, and you, nephew of Francis Weddel and someday to be a chief, hear my words.' Then he began to read. His voice was full, sonorous, above the dark faces, echoing about the august dome in profound and solemn syllables. He read ten sonnets. Then, with his arm lifted, he perorated; his voice died profoundly away and he dropped his arm. A moment later, from outside the building, came a ragged crash of artillery. And now for the first time the dark throng stirred, from among them came a sound, a murmur, of pleased astonishment. The President spoke again. 'Nephew of Francis Weddel, you are free. Return to your home.'

And now the uncle spoke, again his finger wagged from out its froth of lace. 'Heedless boy,' he said. 'Consider the trouble which you have caused these busy men.' He turned to the Secretary, almost briskly; again his voice was bland, pleasant, almost motherly. 'And now, about the little matter of this cursed lord . . .'

With the autumn sun falling warmly and pleasantly across his shoulders, the President said, 'That is all,' quietly, and turned to his desk as the secretary departed. While he took up the letter and opened it the sun fell upon his hands and upon the page, with its inference of the splendid dying of the year, of approaching harvests and of columns of quiet wood-smoke—serene pennons of peace—above peaceful chimneys about the land.

Suddenly the President started; he sprang up, the letter in his hand, glaring at it in shocked and alarmed consternation while the bland words seemed to explode one by one in his comprehension like musketry.

*Dear sir and friend:*

*This is really amusing. Again this hot-headed nephew—he must have taken his character from his father's people, since it is none of mine—has come to trouble you and me. It is this cursed ford again. Another white man came among us, to hunt in peace we thought, since God's forest and the deer which He put in it belong to all. But he too became obsessed with the idea of owning this ford, having heard tales of his own kind who, after the curious and restless fashion of white men, find one side of a stream of water superior enough to the other to pay coins of money for the privilege of reaching it. So the affair was arranged as this white man desired it. Perhaps I did wrong, you will say. But—do I need to tell you?—I am a simple man and some day I shall be old, I trust, and the continuous interruption of these white men who wish to cross and the collecting and care of the coins of money is only a nuisance. For what can money be to me, whose destiny it apparently is to spend my declining years beneath the shade of familiar trees from whose peaceful shade my great white friend and chief has removed the face of every enemy save death? That was my thought, but when you read further you will see that it was not to be.*

*Once more it is this rash and heedless boy. It seems that he challenged this new white man of ours (or the white man challenged him: the truth I will leave to your unerring wisdom to unravel) to a*

*swimming race in the river, the stakes to be this cursed ford against a few miles of land, which (this will amuse you) this wild nephew of mine did not even own. The race took place, but unfortunately our white man failed to emerge from the river until after he was dead. And now your agent has arrived, and he seems to feel that perhaps this swimming race should not have taken place at all. And so now there is nothing for me to do save to bestir old bones and bring this rash boy to you for you to reprimand him. We will arrive in about .*

The President sprang to the bell and pulled it violently. When his secretary entered, he grasped the man by the shoulders and whirled him toward the door again. 'Get me the Secretary of War, and maps of all the country between here and New Orleans!' he cried. 'Hurry.'

And so again we see him; the President is absent now and it is the Soldier alone who sits with the Secretary of War behind the map-strewn table, while there faces them the officers of a regiment of cavalry. At the table his secretary is writing furiously while the President looks over his shoulder. 'Write it big,' he says, 'so that even an Indian cannot mistake it. Know all men by these presents,' he quotes. 'Francis Weddel his heirs, descendants and assigns from now on in perpetuity . . . provided—Have you got provided? Good—provided that neither he nor his do ever again cross to the eastern side of the above described River. . . . And now to that damned agent,' he said. 'The sign must be in duplicate, at both ends of the ford: *The United States accepts no responsibility for any man, woman or child, black, white, yellow or red, who crosses this ford, and no white man shall buy, lease or accept it as a gift save under the severest penalty of the law.* Can I do that?'

'I'm afraid not, Your Excellency,' the Secretary said.

The President mused swiftly. 'Damn,' he said. 'Strike out *The United States*, then.' The Secretary did so. The President folded the two papers and handed them to the cavalry colonel. 'Ride,' he said. 'Your orders are, Stop them.'

'Suppose they refuse to stop,' the colonel said. 'Shall I fire then?'

'Yes,' the President said. 'Shoot every horse, mule, and ox I know they won't walk Off with you, now.' The officers withdrew. The President turned back to the maps—the Soldier still, eager, happy, as though he rode himself with the regiment, or as if in spirit already he deployed it with that shrewd cunning which could discern and choose the place most disadvantageous to the enemy, and get there first. 'It will be here,' he said. He put his finger on the map. 'A horse, General, that I may meet him here and turn his flank and drive him.'

'Done, General,' the Secretary said.

## *Wild Nigger*

BY ELMA GODCHAUX

(From *The Frontier and Midland*)

ZULA, the little humpback nigger girl, was screaming in the rain. She ran along the top of the levee and flung her long thin arms to the sky. Water slid down her fingers to her armpits. 'Wet me, rain! I ain't had bath in a million years. Oh, Gawd. Wet me.' The rain coming down in silvery sheets appeared trying to blot her out, but always, little, crooked, bright, she cavorted in and out the silver lines. Lightning flashes made her laugh and shout. 'What dat you tryin' to show me? My man? Light de light again.' She ran along balancing easily on high heels. Wind and rain lashed her skirt about her. She looked naked, painted and let loose for the dance she did; legs and arms were ebon coloured and polished; torso was bright pink. For her background were the willows on the batture. Goaded by the wind, they bent and tossed to the same dance that Zula did. Thunder rumbled and the river's rushing was a groaning done in time. Zula leaped forward. Now she had to halt, and pouted as she halted to steady the basket covered in black oilcloth she toted on her head. She rushed again, screamed and laughed to hear her voice amid the tumult of the storm and the river's going, it seemed to her her shouts were storm's noises. 'Me an' river,' she giggled, 'we sho' is some case. Man! Where is you? Blue-gummed me an' big river wants to know. Man, don't you hear me? Where is you?' She slipped and splashed mud, giggled and peered through the bars of rain. She had to stop again for her burden. A second she stood still as a carving, neck stiff and high, eyes half closed as if still eyes helped balance her load. Lowered eyes but only half closed caught a gleam at her feet, the same shine as a quick snake makes. Still as hunter watching the hunted she watched the thing in her path. Then stooping quickly, but with neck erect for

her burden, she picked up an open razor. She brought it up close to her eyes as though she couldn't believe it, her negro-long fingers turning it over. It was washed clean. She giggled and nearly cut herself feeling its sharp edges. 'Ain't dat's luck finding something right across my path disaway! Some ole nigger dat's just gone by ain't so lucky as blue-gummed me. Heh, Lawd, blue gums is lucky! A bran' new razor an' I ain't been lookin' for one neither.' She wiped it off between her wet fingers, closed it carefully and tucked it down between her breasts. It was cold as ice there. It tickled her and she had to laugh. 'Gonna play like I ain't lookin' for no man,' she told herself as she went on. But there was no more time for fooling. She was home. She slid down the levee. The big oak tree by her door made the sky dark as night sky there. The cabin was nearly out of sight under the tree as if purposely hid. Oak tree was hung all over with moss that looked like crape hung out for the dead. Zula hurried under it with eyes cast down as if she tried not to see it. It made her sad and lonesome, made her forget she was lucky and had blue gums.

Old Dulcy stood at the open door and shouted out at her before she could set foot on the steps. 'Where you been at? I ain't gonna rest me until I know where you been at.'

Zula giggled. 'It takes a mighty time comin' through de rain.' She stepped inside the door and set her basket on the floor and stood there looking up at Dulcy and giggling.

Dulcy grabbed her and shook her. 'You is a sight. Where you been at?'

'At de store,' she explained easily. 'Ain't you done tole me to get you things for de party?'

Dulcy gave her a shove. 'You is a sight to shame Gawd. Make haste now an' get off my clean floor. You jus' a'drip-pin' puddles. I got a good mind to chastise you good for screamin' an' carryin' on in de rain. You better pray Gawd to save you from de storm steada standin' drippin' puddles on my clean floor. Here is me an' Tootsie been hackin' up hog meat all de day an' mixin' pancake dough.'



Fat Tootsie stood over by the kitchen table, but she wasn't doing anything now, hog meat could wait while she watched the fight 'Crazy nigger,' she muttered to encourage Dulcy.

Tootsie's words drove Zula mad. She didn't take anything from any old nigger standing round. She rushed for Tootsie; she flung herself against the table; she wanted to do Tootsie something so she would know who Zula was, wild nigger Zula who could fix any of them. 'Don't you be crazy-niggerin' me, you hear me, fat womman' And stretched across the table to get at Tootsie.

But Tootsie held her ground and spoke, as lightning flashed into the room, 'Dulcy's sho' right. Gawd gonna kill you if you don't beg to be saved from de storm.' Behind the table, fat and planted squarely on the floor, she looked immovable as an oak tree.

Zula couldn't reach her. She turned and rushed to the window, shoved it up; threw the blinds wide. 'Look, fat nigger, I ain't scared. He ain't gonna do me nothin'. You is my friend, ain't You, Gawd,' she yelled above the thunder. The rain beat against her again and lightning made her bright. Wind shook the cabin.

Tootsie fell on her knees. 'Oh Gawd,' she cried. 'All of us here ain't sinners. Ain't sinners, Gawd, ain't sinners. Ain't sinners. Save us, Lawd Jesus, Gawd, us as ain't sinners, save us. Oh, save us. Gawd, save us. Turn de storm away. Please, Gawd, take it away. Take it to New Orleans. Take it clear out of Louisiana. Please, Gawd, take it. Save us, Gawd! Lawd Jesus, Gawd, save us!'

Zula still faced the storm. 'Look, ole screechin' nigger, Gawd ain't doin' me nothing. I ain't scared, Oh Gawd,' she screamed. And forgot Tootsie. The rain slapping against earth and her sounded like drums beating. 'Oh, Lawd, Lawd Jesus, beat. Beat me some more.'

Dulcy stood in the middle of the floor quiet, watching the two of them screaming and carrying on. She looked clean and decent with hair plaited smooth and calico dress starched. Tootsie on her knees under the table kept bowing her head

and banging her hands against the floor and shouting. When she moved her fat body shook. Sweat made her face shine. Zula at the window stood in shoes big with mud. Her wet dress stretched over her hump. Like all the niggers said, she didn't look right. Arms and legs were too awfully long for that little body, and her hair, never plaited, stuck out in spikes. Now bright beads of rain spangled the kinks. Folks were right to call her wild nigger. Standing there screaming and reaching out into the storm she scared Dulcy. Devil was in her sure, Dulcy knew it. She had to do something to save the child like God meant her to do. But devil in Zula and the storm scared her so she could hardly move. At last she shook herself free of fear and God filled her, old as she was, full of quickness. She told folks afterwards how He gave her the power to grab Zula and throw her down, and He put the might in her arms to close the blinds against the storm. It was against her God-given might that the storm spent itself for now it no longer pounded the cabin and at once the wind was lulled.

Tootsie's eyes stared. "Gawd done lashed de storm," she cried, and rolling on to her back lay panting. 'But Zula gonna burn in hell fire,' she went on when she had breath, 'an' that ole hump gonna make a mighty blaze.'

'Ain't gonna burn no better'n dat black fat on you,' Zula yelled while Dulcy tried to shove her from the room. 'I ain't got but one hump. You has got more. Gawd, you ain't nothin' but hump. Befo' an' behind. Look at your legs an' your sides an' your breas's. One big hump!'

Dulcy slid her away. 'You ain't goin' to no Shrove Tuesday pancake eatin',' Dulcy told her, 'because you ain't fit to go inside church let 'lone church where a eatin' is goin' on. You ain't goin'.' She slammed the shed room door in Zula's face. And went back to Tootsie mournfully. 'Reckon I ain't brought de chile up good,' she sighed. 'Chile acts dat bad I'm 'shamed. 'Shamed like I ain't brought her up good.'

Zula could hear her and later when she and Tootsie were straightening up and shooting the bolts when they went out.

Zula wasn't worried. She sang as soon as she knew they were gone. She wasn't worried. She knew a church eating was just the place for her. Eatings drew strange niggers like cheese did rats. She didn't listen to anybody. She wanted a man. She was lonesome. Rain sliding down her skin felt like caressing hands, but she wanted a man. She began getting herself ready, pulled off her dress and kicked it into a heap laughing. A church eating was fun. If she only had a dress of spangles and could make all those niggers stare. But she didn't worry much. 'Skin was smooth and hair stiff. She brushed out her kinks until they bristled around her head, a black halo. Hair made her think of lightning. The other girls could smooth down their kinks if they wanted to. She liked to be the wildest looking nigger on the place.

When she was ready she walked out of her room. Dulcy was always talking about having that door fixed so she could lock it from the outside, but she hadn't ever fixed it. The kitchen was clean, Zula's tracks and the rain wiped from the floor. The table was scrubbed so that only a dark spot showed where the greasy pork had been. Dulcy was that decent she couldn't stand dirt, she was like white folks, Zula thought. Zula sang and shook her hips going across the floor. But door was padlocked. Shucks, she didn't care. You couldn't keep a blue-gummed nigger down. Padlocks weren't nothing to her. There was that swollen blind. It was easy to get her slim fingers through the crack and work up the wooden bolt, bolt that was made especially for her. She laughed. She didn't even hurry. She sat awhile straddling the window-sill. She watched the quiet world. The storm had passed; the world was still as if spent. She could hear the twitterings of sparrows become important and the splash of drops of water. She sat quiet as if listening, hushed maybe by the world's hush, but her small breasts moved with her deep breaths and her eyes were wide. At last with a sigh she jumped down and tucked her dress high, fixed shoes and stockings under her arm, and so waded into the mud on the levee. Across the mild sky a rainbow arched. It seemed to touch the levee and cross the

river like a bridge Zula looked at it, and there was a man Blurred by slouching walk and flapping clothes he came surrounded by the rainbow

Zula rushed forward moving her arms and legs quickly like her heart was moving, shaking her hips and shouting, 'Dancin' in de bright moonshine, flinging up de head, kickin' up behind' He saw that she was that wild Zula and she that he was the new yellow nigger 'Look, mister, disaway flingin' up de head, disaway kickin' up behind.'

He slapped his sides laughing, 'Dat right, honey, dat de way.'

She wanted to know if he wasn't going to the eating at the church. 'My Gawd, you ain't! Where you gonna get pancakes to-night? Ain't nobody done tole you to-night is Shrove Tuesday? You know as well as me if you don't eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday night you gonna be scratchin' wid de mange befo' morning' She pitied him with no kinfolks or nobody else to bother with him and tell him what was what She would take him under her wing 'Mange ain't gonna get you, chère, you comin' to de eatin' wid me' When he looked doubtful she pursued, 'De mange or pancakes drippin' wid cane syrup I ain't gonna love you if de ole mange get you'

He turned with her and she went along beside him moving like a monkey on a string 'I'm lookin' at you,' he told her, 'but you don't look so mighty church like you sounds'

'Who? Me? I ain't nothin', me. But my tante is I lives wid her, in de cabin under de big ole oak tree, de one drippin' wid de most moss But you don't have to be scared if you go to church wid me. Ain't nobody gonna do you nothin'. Can't you see I got blue gums?' And she bared her gums for him to see. He looked at her and they both laughed Heh Lawd, blue gums were lucky.

The clapboard church stood in a yard that was a slough of mud. Two pigs grunted and rooted in front of it. A pair of chickens roosted in the chinaberry tree by the door. Wagons and a mildewed gig were tied under the shed that leaned against the fence. A negro climbed the stile into the

yard. Inside negroes were crowded to the door. Zula took the yellow nigger by the hand and shoved her way in. Benches were strung around the walls turning church into a dance hall, but preacher was in sight in the pulpit eating. The heavy smells of grease, fried pork, cooked brown sugar, sweat, crowded with the people in the room. Tallow candles made dull pools of light along the walls, and one fly-stained coal-oil lamp hung from a rafter. A layer of smoke swung near the ceiling. Masses of black heads moved. Sometimes white teeth showed quick lights. Spats of tobacco juice went swiftly out open windows at regular intervals. Loud laughs and shouts punctuated the rumble of talk. Zula hung on the edge of the crowd near the door. She didn't want Dulcy to see her and send her home. She had to be careful. She stayed where she was and saw big old Ginny with her head above the crowd. Ginny was good.

'Gawd, I can't move,' Zula yelled, 'I'm stuck here like I can't move. Ginny, you looks like you is most to de place where dey is dishin' out. Get me my pancakes. One for a man here an' me''

'What de matter wid you? You got legs.' Ginny called back.

'Who? Me? My little ole legs ain't nothin' for dis big ole crowd. Ginny, ain't you gonna go, 'cause if you is I gonna do somethin' for you. Please. Make haste. Gawd, I feels de itch of de mange already.' As Ginny turned to go Zula added, 'Don't you tell Tante I is here, 'cause she ain't gonna like it if I feels itchy right dis minute. Don't you tell Tante nothin'. Heh Lawd, I got de mange right dis minute, I is'

She laughed and shouted out to everybody. Her face was black and shiny; eyes with whites brown-splotched hardly showed in the inky blackness of her face. She turned to the yellow nigger to whisper intimately, the way women did with their own men. She grabbed him and tried to dance, but folks were so jammed together she could only stand close to him and sway in her tracks. She forgot about pancakes until she had the plate in her hand. She and the yellow nigger

shoved their way to places on a bench. It was safe, because Dulcy would still be minding the pots. Zula knew how to manage. She felt safe. There wasn't anything on earth to worry about.

'Darln' sugar, ain't dat's a plateful?' she asked the yellow nigger. Then they ate in silence.

He sighed at last. 'Gawd, I wish I could'a left my dinner at home.'

'Go ahead,' she giggled, 'make haste an' eat de pancakes first. You can bust open after dat.'

Flat feet shuffled tattoos on the floor. Zula pressed close to the yellow nigger. The excitement in her was his excitement, she felt the keen edge of it against her body wherever he touched her. She looked up to see him admire her. But he wasn't looking at her. For him she wasn't there. She watched his eyes wander about looking for something. They found a girl and stayed on her. Girl's big eyes and his seemed locked together. Zula grabbed him, calling to him. She shook him. But it was no use. She couldn't reach that look of his that still went beyond her to the girl. It wasn't fair. Hadn't she brought him and stuffed him full of pancakes? He was hers. Big-eyed had a man. It wasn't fair. She felt her wildness die within her. The yellow nigger shouted out to Big-eyed and Big-eyed answered with giggles.

Zula pressed against Yellow Nigger's arm trying to call him to herself. 'Look at me, honey. I is a wild nigger sho' enough.' She got her arms around his neck.

'Baby, what you wants?' he asked, and looked at her. Tiny face under the shelf of her hair was blue black, so black shadowed by her hair, she was ugly as a witch, but the yellow nigger didn't mind. 'Baby, my mamma was a witch,' he told her, and they laughed.

'Let's get out of here,' Zula said. 'Eatin's done finished.'

And Yellow Nigger followed her like she held him in a trance.

Outside the moon seemed to lay a paralysing hand. The hogs lay in the mud motionless and the chickens didn't stir.

On the levee mules slept with hanging heads Except for Zula and the yellow nigger the road was bare, they looked tiny on its blackness, dark spots on the clean white ribbon of a road that wound the way the river ran They didn't talk She watched him with wide eyes, and her long arms swinging were black polished pendulums. They turned off the main road and passed through a whitewashed gate that led through cane fields to the woods The young cane leaves were pale in the moonlight, silk streamers in gleaming rows stretching far to the woods' dark line The shine sure made the yellow nigger bright He stood out beside her blackness as if he were something better than a nigger He led her slowly, stopping sometimes to pass his hands over her and to kiss her. They walked beyond the ruins of the old sugar-house where the great wheel of the sugar mill partly covered with creeper stood out above the field They went through cane brake and bramble where the wood swallowed the road They were swallowed, too, by the dark wood They were hid like a secret She lay still in his arms at last as if he'd tamed her Not even mosquitoes bothered her But now she moved to slap at them, and when an animal call way off yonder among the trees broke the quiet, sounding fearful in so still a wood Then she pressed close as she could to the yellow nigger. His body against hers made fear delicious Bats swung low in shapes of heavy blackness and mosquitoes kept up their thin monotonous whining

'I ain't gonna last long,' she giggled 'Mosquitoes gonna eat me up'

'Yes you is,' he assured her, 'but you is sweet as de cane juice Wish ole mosquitocs gonna let me have a bite.'

'You an' ole mosquitocs let me be,' she laughed

She pretended to run away She liked to have him following. She heard him heavy-footed among the trunks and palms and Spanish Daggais. He could see her when the moonlight sifted on her through the leaves She was low as a child with her back hunched forward as if she hunted something. She reached for orange tiger lilies in the swamp, and a water

moccasin slid between her fingers into the water. She laughed to feel its coldness. Sharp as a razor blade it cleaved through the green scum on the water. The yellow nigger moved away from her and pouted; he was mad. He told her she'd stirred up bad luck. She scoffed at that. He was crazy talking to a blue-gummed nigger about bad luck. All hoodoo niggers had blue gums, she said. She could hoodoo up good luck for him and her, bad luck for some folks, too. And snakes weren't nothing to her. Yellow Nigger stared at her hard. God, she sure did look like a witch standing there between two tall cypress trees. Trees were naked except for the moss that shrouded them in ghostly whiteness. The moon made winding sheets of the moss.

Zula was giggling like nothing could scare her. 'Darlin' sugar, your girl is lucky sho' enough.' And came close to him. She was smooth and cool to his touch and he kissed her.

Day came too soon. They didn't want day and work. But they followed the road from the wood as if they couldn't help themselves, routine-held.

They stood together at the gate that gave on the main road. 'You is my man, dat de truth, ain't it, chère? You don't pay no attention to ole hump away off yonder on de back of my back, such a little ole hump stuck between my shoulder blades. If I stands just so, look, it don't show. You gonna come to Zula mighty soon. It de truth, ain't it, chère?'

'Sho'. Dat's de Gawd's truth. Baby, you don't have to worry none, 'cause sho' I'm gonna come.'

She watched him shuffle off. When he was out of sight she turned slowly towards the quarters. Tiptoed into the perpetual night under the oak tree; she didn't want to wake Dulcy. She'd get killed, she reckoned, if Dulcy woke and learned she'd been out all night. But she didn't care. She didn't care for anything but the yellow nigger and herself.

Days were not the same to Zula now. They were sweet. Any time of day Dulcy would catch Zula doing nothing, sitting in the doorway in attitudes she would like the yellow



nigger to see her in. It was as though his eyes were always on her, and when she sat quiet she felt his hands as if he touched her. Lazing around the cabin oak tree didn't bother her; seemed like now its shadows couldn't reach her. But nights were better than days, because nights he came prowling round. If Dulcy were home he slunk off back to the nigger boarding-house. But Zula managed to get out and go after him. She wasn't letting any sweet hours pass her by. She found him and they went to the woods or sporting on the levee. They would stay on the levee until nearly morning. She would fling herself into angular shapes in the moonlight. Her body against the light screen of the sky looked like the shadow cast by a gymnastic dancer. She had a wonderful time. The people in the quarters would hear her carrying on. That shrill laugh of hers floated out over the river. Folks reckoned you could hear her clear across the river. She sang out and hugged the yellow nigger. She never walked out of the path for other folks to get by. She went right up to them shouting, ' "Gangway, catfish, cross dat bar. We'se a'comin' on de Guidin' Star" ' And she and the other girl's man scuffled playfully before a passage was effected. Yes, she had a grand time at night, and she never minded how Dulcy scolded when she came home at all hours. She showed her little white teeth and shrugged her shoulders while Dulcy raved. She went about with swaggering hips. All the niggers knew that that little old wild Zula had got herself a man. They said Yellow Nigger was the easiest man they ever saw, but Zula didn't pay them any mind. Life was wonderful. Days and nights.

Saturday nights she went to the store and sat alongside of her man. She did what other girls did. She felt proud. She loved to have the folks crowding in the store notice her. 'Hi,' to those who didn't see her. 'Guiot, hi.' 'Look who here. Hi, Bull.' And they went by laughing at her. She sure was a case screaming out to everybody and loving the yellow nigger at the same time. Big-eyed passed close to where they sat and Francine came up swinging her hips, but Yellow

Nigger didn't seem to notice any of them. 'Heh Lawd, Blue-gums is wld to-night sho' enough,' Zula shouted. Folks got their pay-checks cashed and then pushed back to see what she was doing.

'Man, you sho' is occupied,' somebody called to the yellow nigger

'Ain't dat so,' cried Zula, 'I got glue to stick me wid my man.' And turning to the yellow nigger, 'Darlin' sugar, I is your rightful owner'

'Sho',' laughed the yellow nigger

His eyes slid over her. She wanted to fasten his eyes to her. He was hers; not even humps mattered when Blue-gums had them

Nights followed days quickly, but Saturday nights never came too soon for Zula. She knew to a minute when Yellow Nigger would pass for her. She sat down on the step to wait for him. He'd be along mighty soon now, slouching along like he was weary. The world was growing dark as that part shadowed by oak tree. She crouched down hugging her knees. Yellow Nigger was late. Chill under oak tree bit into her. Folks passing on the road caught the gleam of her dress. 'Man done forget you,' they shouted, going by. Tootsie next door called from her gallery, 'You gonna freeze crouchin' dere'. Zula knew how fat Tootsie shook with her laughter, but Zula wouldn't answer a thing. She couldn't. She was busy waiting for the yellow nigger. Something must have happened to him. But she couldn't move, heart was paralysed, she felt it in her throat heavy and immovable; she couldn't do a thing. But blue gums were charm against evil. Blue gums, go on, do your work now! She shut her eyes praying, 'Gawd, let blue gums work. Gawd, please. You done Yourself give me blue gums for luck. Gawd, let 'em work now! Please!' Face was screwed up to keep her eyes shut. She would keep them shut like this until the yellow nigger came. 'Oh please, Jesus.' She sat there hugging her knees and rocking herself as if motion eased distress. 'Please, Jcsus, Lawd. Please.' Feet dragging just so took her breath; then

opened her eyes; released her heart. Yes, sir, when Blue-gums prayed Gawd heard.

She rushed out to meet him. 'Darlin' honey! At last you is here. Gawd, I is weary lovin' you by myself. For lovin' I needs you.' She reached up to kiss him.

He was stiff as a steel rod. He held himself from her. His quick hand shoved her. The blow knocked her down. She couldn't raise herself even when she heard him running. His feet pounded, pounded away. She felt his feet pounding the earth as if they pounded her. Feet stunned her. She lay sprawled in the dusty road. People came crowding round her, touching her and talking. Then she got up and shoved the helping hands away as if they made her mad. She brushed the dust from her dress and laughed. Dust rose to her eyes and made them smart with tears. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she laughed.

When the cabins were empty and moon and stars were in their places she started down the road. The store's festive lights teased her with loneliness as she padded softly but firmly on the hard path. Her footfalls hardly disturbed the quiet. Nothing stirred, not even the willows on the batture. They were silvered by moonlight and shone, but all was still as breathless pause. Zula knew that everybody was crowded in the store and only she was left out in the lonesome darkness. She went quickly on murmuring to herself and sighing. Lawd Jesus, Gawd. But she knew she didn't have to worry; she was lucky. Sure she was lucky, but to-night she felt strange, like she wasn't herself. Her sighing made hardly the sound of a deep breath. It seemed to her she made no headway though she moved so quickly. She felt emptied of herself as if Yellow Nigger had taken her heart when he left her. Now she was a wraith moving in a void.

At last she came close to the store. It leaked niggers, but she didn't see her nigger. Niggers overflowed on to the gallery, the steps and the road. They made the noise of a big time pay-day night. Men chewed and spat and smoked; the women, too; they called out and laughed. Zula charged into the mob

pushing folks aside with her strong hands. The people looked down at her and chuckled 'Look who here; wild nigger Zula' They couldn't help laughing at her. She was so busy shoving herself through she didn't see anybody. She sure was funny with her kinks sticking out in crazy ways and her dress above her knees. She went pushing folks aside, but nobody cared—old wild Zula. Nobody got mad. 'Heh Lawd, Zula, why you pouting? Ain't you got paid off?' 'Sho' is paid off.' They laughed. But she didn't pay them any mind; just pushed on intent on her business. 'Your nigger ain't here,' somebody giggled. 'He done got swallowed up.' 'Heh Lawd' Chuckles rippled through the crowd after her. She was funny when she pouted; looked like a clown frowning. She went turning this way and that as if she didn't know where she was hurrying to. But she knew she was going to the yellow nigger. Yes, Gawd and she had only to see him and let her blue gums work. She didn't have blue gums for nothing. They were for luck. Just lead her to him, Blue-gums. She shoved her way between big Ginny and Peg. And there the yellow nigger was. The sight of him came as a surprise, as if she hadn't expected to see him. He sat dangling his legs from the counter, and he had a girl in her place. He had his arms around Big-eyed. Zula stood arrested before him, panting. Sight of him sitting there froze her. She forgot to swing her hips. But that's what he liked, swinging hips and blue gums showing.

'Heh Lawd, sugar,' she called, 'look who here.'

When he looked he would see something. She cut capers like nobody ever saw, shuddering and shaking and grinning so that blue gums showed. But he didn't look. He didn't see her.

She had to call him again. 'Sugar! Oh, sugar! Look who here! Ole Blue-gums. Darlin' sugar, ole Blue-gums.' She shook herself and waved her arms. Head was bowed now watching her feet shuffling quick and kicking high. Lips were sealed over her lucky gums. She frowned, moving in an agony of motion. 'Oh Lawd, sugar! Blue-gums! Your

woman done come for you. Look, sugar! Blue-gums!' She panted, moving the way he liked to see her, hands waving, black flags in a gale, hips jerking, breasts shaking. Sweat ran down her cheeks in tears. 'Darlin' sugar.'

But it was just like she wasn't there. He didn't look at her; looked this way and that like he couldn't find a place for his eyes, looking at Big-eyed, at his hands, but not at Zula. Zula felt mad. She kept telling herself she didn't have to feel mad because now Blue-gums had started to work. Look out, Yellow Nigger.

'Here I is, wild Zula! I is full to the gullet with wildness.' She moved closer to him. 'I is a witch for wildness. You better look at me, nigger.'

Yellow Nigger shifted in his seat. But he didn't look at her; kept looking at his hands like he was ashamed of something. Then he whispered to Big-eyed. Acted like he was Big-eyed's man. Zula had to stand still at last to watch him. She watched him as if she couldn't see him right sitting up there making out like she didn't stand before him. Big-eyed pressed close to him and giggled. Folks crowded up laughing and made a circle round Zula and Yellow Nigger and Big-eyed. Zula didn't know the people were there. She only saw Yellow Nigger and the girl in her place beside him. She stood watching with her head thrust forward and her hands reaching out like she was struck inanimate in the act of grabbing something. People nearly died laughing. She looked funny standing still like that, like a clown who'd forgot her part. Yellow Nigger didn't laugh. He sat pouting and moving his eyes about like he hunted for a place to rest them.

But Big-eyed wasn't nervous. 'A nigger with a hump on her back and blue gums—lots of niggers has blue gums. Ain't nothing to be scared of,' she giggled to the yellow nigger.

Yellow Nigger had to giggle with her. But he didn't giggle much. Zula didn't move watching him. She was still as a statue and eyes watched him with a statue's stare. He moved nervously like he didn't know how to endure her eyes any

longer But Zula didn't move Big-eyed kept laughing She slapped Yellow Nigger on the back and hollered with laughter. Then Yellow Nigger looked at her and laughed too. They laughed together and rocked their bodies, even.

'Heh Lawd, Baby Big-eyes,' he shouted looking at her, 'who is scared of who?' They sure were having a good time laughing and rocking with their bodies locked together. 'Heh Lawd, Baby' He felt Big-eyed's shoulders under his arm heaving with laughter, and he wasn't afraid and raised his eyes to Zula's 'Sho', Zula,' he called to her, 'you ain't nobody to be scared of Say, Humped-back,' and he laughed, 'stop a-lookin' at me thataway.' He had to laugh a lot He felt big sitting up with Big-eyed and hollering down at Zula

Zula watched him hollering. His voice yelling at her made her hot She burned She had to stop him hollering like that words that burnt her. 'Stop it! Stop a-hollerin', nigger!' But she couldn't yell above his voice. She tried again He had to hear her 'Nigger! Stop it!'

He kept laughing and hollering like she hadn't made a sound. She knew she hadn't made a sound; she only thought she spoke

He hollered and laughed. His mouth was open wide 'Zula, go on Can't you see I is occupied?'

She made the motions of speaking, 'Stop it, nigger' But she knew her voice was lost in her mouth

He sat there hugging Big-eyed and hollering at her and she couldn't speak She moved Yellow Nigger saw her coming with her head sticking out like she meant to butt him. The bare razor blade caught the light and flashed as she raised it and was out of sight in the yellow nigger. Yellow Nigger wore it now between the breasts in the place where Zula used to carry it He slumped against Big-eyed and she screamed. She screamed and screamed. Zula didn't know what made her scream like that and slink away in and out among the people. People pressed up to where Zula sat in Big-eyed's place. They stared and touched the yellow nigger 'Lawd Jesus.' 'Gawd' But Zula didn't pay them any mind. She held the

yellow nigger in her arms. He lay in her arms without moving. He didn't make a sound. She rocked him, bent over him and sighed. 'Darlin' sugar,' comforting him as if he were sick. When commotion died to a rustling and the niggers began to clear out she sat rocking him and moaning.

# *Little White Girl*

BY SARA HAARDT

(From *Scribner's Magazine*)

## I

SUSIE TARLETON spread out her skirts, sat down on a patch of Bermuda grass under the big oak tree, and started digging rapidly in the damp ground in front of her. When she had scooped out a triangular hole about the size of the piece of broken window glass she was using as a trowel, she laid the glass down and rested her chin on her knees. For a moment it came to her, with a twinge of guilt, that she shouldn't be here digging in the dirt in her fresh afternoon clothes—she should be out on the front veranda, or stringing four o'clocks in the garden, like a good little girl. But she hated playing by herself when there was Pinky to play with.

Pinky was Aunt Hester's little girl, born the month before Susie, and they had played on the same pallet spread under the big oak tree when they were babies, for Aunt Hester was Susie's mammy. Now that she was eight years old Susie didn't need a mammy any more, except to help her dress in the afternoon, but she hadn't missed a day playing with Pinky—and she never would!

'Pinky, Pinky,' she called in her high treble. 'Here I am under the oak tree!'

There was a scurrying, as of a frantic little animal, along the path from Aunt Hester's cabin, and with a winged leap Pinky was there. She wasn't very black—her satiny yellow skin merely looked as if she had a good tan—and Aunt Hester had trained her stiff black hair to lie flat to her head. Susie loved the feel of Pinky's skin, and the smell of the magnolia balm that Aunt Hester greased her hair with, and the fresh starchy smell of Pinky's calico dresses. She loved everything about Pinky with all her heart.

'You can pick the roses while I'm finishing the nest for



hem,' she told Pinky now, and Pinky ran as fast as her skinny legs could carry her to the garden.

Susie continued digging in the damp ground with the triangular piece of glass, and when she had finished she leaned her head against the trunk of the big oak tree. She closed her eyes and sniffed in the sweetly saturated afternoon air. It was nice, she told herself, to play with Pinky.

Even on the hottest day the big oak tree with its mauve cool shade was a wonderful play-house. It was so quiet and far away that no grown-up could intrude upon it without a warning rustle of leaves and boughs. Susie was sure the little white girl who was moving on the next plantation and who was coming to spend the day with her to-morrow, would think it was wonderful too. It was strange to think of a little girl living near her—a little *white* girl named Alice Louise Pratt.

She stood up quickly and curtsied, as she would to-morrow when Alice Louise came to see her. 'I am Susie Farleton,' she rehearsed in a small voice. 'Who are you?'

'It's hurryin',' Pinky answered her from the garden. 'It's comin' fas' as I kin.'

Susie dropped her skirts, and stiffened. She hadn't told Pinky about Alice Louise, and for some reason unknown to her, she didn't want to tell Pinky.

She stood there motionless with her hands clasped tightly behind her while Pinky fluttered along the garden path like a gay butterfly with the flowers held high for her to see.

'Here I is!' Pinky called joyously.

Susie parted her lips to answer, but her throat was dry, and no sound came. She looked at Pinky's shining face, and reached out her hands for the bouquet.

The next instant both of them dropped on the ground beneath the big oak tree, and Susie forgot all about Alice Louise. Nobody could play penny-poppy show like Pinky! Susie held the bouquet while Pinky patted the sides of the hole in the ground she had made with the glass, leaving a few clods of earth loose to stick the flower stems in. Swiftly

yet carefully Pinky lined the hole with camphor leaves; then she selected first one rose and then another

When she was through, she paused and drew a bunch of lavender from the bosom of her calico dress 'I dunno why I picked *this*, when you said the show was to be onliest of roses, but seem like I couldn't pass it by'

'Oh, it looks *sweet*, Pinky!' Susie cried The pungent smell of the lavender thrilled her nostrils more than the fragrance of the roses She flashed a warm smile across the gathering dusk Pinky's taste was perfect, the lavender and the roses looked far lovelier together than the roses ever could have looked by themselves

Pinky tucked in the last plume of lavender, and started to polish the piece of glass on her plain little ticking underskirt Then she held up the glass expertly by the very edge so she would not leave any finger-prints on it The secret of penny-poppy show was to cover the flowers in the ground with the shining glass, then to cover the glass with dirt scraped out of the hole, and to scrape a peep-hole in the dirt to look through; but somehow, this afternoon Susie couldn't bear to see the flowers covered up.

'Wait just a minute!' she cried, and stooping swiftly buried her nose in them as if this were the last time she would ever fill her nostrils with their fragrance.

Pinky waited silently until she sat up, Susie helped her put the glass over the flowers, and, finally, pat the earth over the glass until the ground was as smooth as it had been before Pinky gathered up the fallen petals, and looked inquiringly at Susie

According to rule, Susie should scrape back the earth now so they could see the flowers, framed in their nest like a picture, but she sat still, her eyes staring at the ground

'Dey'll be jes' as fiesh to-morrow,' Pinky said very softly. 'I wuz careful to stick their stems clean th'ugh the wet dirt.'

'Let's wait until to-morrow to look at it,' Susie answered quickly, before Pinky had got the word out of her mouth.

'Dey'll be jes' as pretty,' Pinky promised

'To-morrow, then.' Susie got up, and walked with Pinky to the far edge of the shadow cast by the big oak tree in the deepening twilight. It was Pinky's supper-time, and she waved a hand to Susie as she disappeared down the path to Aunt Hester's cabin.

Susie stood watching the tall grass on the sides of the path that Pinky's flight had set in motion, then she turned and walked back to the big oak tree. It was quite dark underneath the sheltering branches and invisible insects flew with a humming sound past her ears. A light bloomed in the kitchen of the house. It would soon be *her* supper-time, time for her to go up the trim paths of the garden to the house, yet she lingered in the spooky shadow of the big oak tree.

When, at last, she did go, she ran with all her might and main, staring hard at the bright light in the kitchen, and passing unheeded the white evening flowers that bloomed newly at her feet.

## II

In the morning Susie waited on the front veranda behind the Madeira vines for the automobile that would bring Alice Louise. She wore a fresh afternoon dress and her black patent-leather Mary Jane slippers, and her eyes blazed with excitement until they blotted out the rest of her round little face. Impatiently she rehearsed her meeting with Alice Louise.

She stood up and curtsied. 'I am Susie Tarleton. Who are you?'

Before Alice Louise had time to reply, 'I am Alice Louise Pratt, your new playmate, who has come to see you,' a shiny black car turned off the road on to the drive, and stopped at the side of the house.

Susie felt like skipping down the steps to meet Alice Louise, as she skipped down the kitchen steps every morning to meet Pinky, but she stood, motionless, in a breathless hush. Through a hole in the Madeira vine she saw a white

man in uniform climb out of the driver's seat, and open the back door of the car. After an incredibly long moment a little girl stepped out sedately; she walked past the man without a word, and the man followed her, carrying a small tan bag with gold letters on it.

They had only a few steps to walk from the car to the veranda steps, yet every detail of the little girl's perfection was imprinted upon Susie's mind. She saw the expensive plainness of the white dress, the pin-tucks and carefully fitted sleeves and rich creamy material. She saw the little girl's slippers, so finely made of dull leather with shaped heels. She saw the little girl's finely woven hat with a blue-velvet ribbon—velvet in summer!—round the crown.

Susie thought of her old sun hat made of plaited grasses, forgotten until now on the landing upstairs, that she wore when she wore any hat at all, and blushed. She was blushing furiously when she faced the little girl at last, and instead of curtsying as she had practised, she backed shyly a few steps.

The little girl bowed to her, and said, 'I am Alicia Pratt. Are you Susie Tarleton?'

Susie bowed then, and answered her, 'Yes, I am Susie Tarleton. I am glad you have come. But my mother said your name was Alice Louise.'

'I changed my name,' Alicia announced in a clear, precise voice. 'I was named for my Grandmother Pratt, but she's dead and I won't be named such a funny name any more.'

'Won't you—won't you take off your hat?' gulped Susie. She had never, even in story books, seen anybody as pretty as Alicia. Her skin was really-truly as pale as the petals of a white japonica, her hair, now that her hat was off, was as fine as silk and a beautiful golden colour all the way through, not just streaked with golden lights like her own brown mop. And she had what Aunt Hester called 'airs and graces'.

'You can leave my bag, George,' she told the man carelessly. 'I'll expect you at five.'

Susie was aghast. Perhaps she had better invite Alicia into her mother's drawing-room until Alicia decided what she wanted to play. 'Did you want to change your dress first—or anything?' she asked shyly.

'Oh, no,' Alicia assured her. 'I don't suppose we'll *hurt* anything. I hate rough games.'

'Do you know any games?' Susie inquired eagerly.

'I knew about twenty games before I got tired of them,' Alicia answered, with royal detachment. 'I had a playroom all to myself in our house in town and I used to play bagatelle with my governess.'

'Bagatelle?' Susie marvelled. She held back the curtains of the drawing-room, and waited uneasily for Alicia's next move.

Alicia smiled. 'Tell me about *your* games,' she commanded.

For a moment Susie was so rattled she could not speak. She couldn't, she decided swiftly, tell Alicia about the penny-poppy show, or about the corn-silk dolls that she and Pinky played with, or about catching doodles with a broomstraw dabbled in spit. 'Well,' she hesitated, 'I know a *few* games, but I'm afraid you'll hurt your dress.'

'Name one,' persisted Alicia.

Susie wet her dry lips. 'I like to catch doodles,' she ventured. 'I know a song to sing to them that charms them right out of their holes.'

'Ugh!' shivered Alicia. 'I wouldn't touch one of the nasty things for a *fortune*.'

'We might play greenie,' Susie ventured.

'How very silly!' Alicia's soft syllables took away their sting. 'It's only a baby game.'

'I tell you what,' Susie warmly promised. 'Let's go out under the big oak tree and call Pinky. I'll take a pillow so you won't hurt your dress. Pinky's a million times better at games than I am!'

There fell a strangely chilling silence, broken by Alicia's polite question, 'And who is Pinky?'

Susie blushed. 'Why, Pinky's my best friend—my playmate,' she answered simply, and though she knew Alicia had never had such a wonderful playmate she felt vaguely apologetic and unhappy.

## III

The sun was shining brightly, but it was cool under the big oak tree. Susie laid the pillow on the ground close to the trunk, and Alicia sat upon it daintily, her delicate little hands in her lap, like a princess upon a throne.

'Pinky, Pinky,' called Susie happily, reassured by her familiar outdoors.

Pinky came running along the path from Aunt Hester's cabin like a streak of flame, for she was wearing one of her red calico dresses. She stopped short and bobbed her head with the friendliest of smiles when she reached the shade of the oak tree.

'Hurry up, Pinky,' Susie called. 'We're waiting for you to play games.' Then, with naive pleasure, she turned to Alicia. 'This is my playmate Pinky, Alicia. She's the one I told you about.'

Alicia stared at Pinky with her cool grey eyes until Pinky picked at the hem of her dress nervously. 'How do you do?' Alicia said at last, icily. 'Miss Susie said you could play games, but I think I'd rather look over her mother's fashion-books. I'd like a glass of water, too, if you please.'

Pinky's mouth opened distressedly, and closed. She looked at Susie for help, and Susie gulped. 'Please bring us a pitcher of water, Pinky. And all mother's fashion-books on her sewing-table.'

Pinky flashed her a bewildered look, and began walking slowly to the house. All the life was gone from her step. Susie felt the blood boiling in her veins as she watched her out of sight. She could have turned upon Alicia and clawed her to pieces. Yet, she didn't. She didn't lift her hand, or say a word.

Alicia stirred on her cushion, and her finely starched

dress rustled like tissue paper. 'She's a nigger,' she declared in her sharp little voice. 'The very idea of your playing with a nigger!'

'I like her,' Susie said stubbornly, the red burning in her cheeks. 'I've always played with her.'

'Maybe you did when you were a baby,' Alicia's syllables fell silvery cool, 'but you're entirely too big to play with her now. Why, you're as grown as I am, and I haven't played with a nigger in ages!'

Susie moved into the darkest spot of the shade, and sat down. She felt, literally, sick inside, as if her stomach were twisting in agony and her heart were too hurt to beat any more. The worst of it was she could not answer Alicia easily, for Alicia's manner *had* made her feel different about Pinky—as though she were siding with Alicia against Pinky whether she wanted to or no.

'Pinky is my mammy's little girl, and we grew up together,' she explained again, carefully, despising herself the while.

'Well, you don't have to play with her any more—now,' declared Alicia.

Susie nodded and looked up with a half-smile, but her pleasure in Alicia, in the clear golden morning, was gone. She started digging in the earth with a broken twig, to keep from thinking of what she would *say* to Pinky when she came back. I'll say I'd rather play with *her* any day in the week, that's what I'll say, she told herself. I'll say, Alicia or no little white girl will ever make me stop playing with her, that's what I'll say!

Presently Pinky came out of the kitchen door and walked slowly toward them with a pitcher of water and some glasses on a tray. The twig dropped from Susie's hand, and she made a quick motion to Pinky to set the tray beside Alicia.

'Miss Alicia would like some water,' she said in a flat voice, faintly imitative of Alicia's.

Pinky nodded. Her little yellow face with her sparkling chinquapin eyes had hardened into a mask of sober deference.

She set the tray down, and carefully poured a glass of water, without looking at either Susie or Alicia. Susie was amazed. Pinky's manner was as remote, as impersonal, as if they had never met before. In the short space it had taken her to walk into the house and back, Pinky had become a little parlour-maid who knew her place. Not even when Susie caught her eye at last and smiled warmly did she blink an eyelid.

'Here are the fashion-books,' she said in a flat tone, and put them beside Alicia. Then she did something that caught at Susie's heart like a spasm of pain—she backed away a few steps and curtsied, as the older servants did to Susie's mother, their mistress. The gesture was so admirable that Alicia bowed in acknowledgment.

But Susie closed her eyes to hide the tears swimming in them, and when she looked up again Pinky was gone. In the deepening shade of the big oak tree Alicia seemed paler, more precious, than ever. Like a white japonica, Susie thought with a sharp twinge of jealousy.

Yet she moved over toward her obediently a moment later, when Alicia called to her to come choose paper-dolls.

#### IV

All during the time she was choosing paper-dolls with Alicia, and even while she was accepting Alicia's invitation to spend the day with *her* to-morrow, Susie was looking forward to the time when Alicia would be gone, and she could call to Pinky to come look at their penny-poppy show under the big oak tree. At last Alicia went home in the shiny black car, and she was alone. It was getting dark, but no darker than yesterday, when they had made the penny-poppy show. And Pinky had said the flowers would be as fresh as the day they were picked.

Susie ran to the big oak tree, calling, 'Pinky, Pinky,' at the top of her lungs. How free she felt as she ran along the path without Alicia tagging her! It was darker under the



tree than she had thought, but if Pinky would hurry they would still be able to see the penny-poppy show. 'Pinky, Pinky!' she called softly, urgently, and tilted her head sideways so she could hear Pinky's first running steps.

At first she heard only the hum of invisible insects, flying past her ears, and then the humming deepened to the sound of human voices. She recognized Aunt Hester scolding Pinky, and Aunt Hester's words came clear and hard, like the sound of hickory nuts falling to frozen ground.

'You kin go an' speak to her if it'll ease yo' pain, but you tell her you know the diff'ence between a white chile and a black chile, and y'all cain't play together no more. Hit wuz boun' to come. Quit that sniffin' an' go yonder an' tell her lak I tole you.'

After a while Pinky came up the path from the cabin. She did not run like a streak of light this time. She came slowly, and she wiped her eyes on the hem of her calico dress.

Susie waited for her under the oak tree near the penny-poppy show, but she knew only too well that they would not look at the penny-poppy show, or ever make another together.

'I heard Aunt Hester,' she told Pinky. 'I heard what Aunt Hester said.' Although her voice sounded calm and grown-up like Alicia's, her heart felt as if it would break.

Pinky stood before her in the dim light, rubbing one lovely yellow hand over the other, and it came to Susie that it was really Aunt Hester who had stopped Pinky from playing with her—not Alicia or herself. Susie *had* given in to Alicia while Alicia was her guest, as was proper, but Pinky knew she would come back, Pinky knew Susie loved her better than all the little white girls in the world.

'I can't play with you no more,' Pinky said at last. 'Mammy says I can't play with you no more.'

'I heard her,' Susie answered, and in the dim light her face looked as white as Alicia's.

'I have to go back,' Pinky whispered, and curtsied as she had before Alicia, 'unless—unless you *want* anything.'

Susie nodded imperiously as Alicia had nodded before her, as all the little white girls for generations back had nodded to their little black playmates. Only, Susie felt the tears dripping down her throat, and so bitter were they that they tasted like brine in her mouth. 'No,' she mimicked Alicia completely, 'I don't *care* for anything.'

For the briefest moment Pinky hesitated; then she turned and walked slowly down the path the way she had come.

## Remarks: None

BY WILLIAM WISTER HAINES

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

### I

I WAS sorry for Regan. He was a good lineman when that woman left him alone. He wasn't the best I ever seen. He was too young and he hadn't been around enough. But at that he was good enough to rate a job in a good wire train. And if he could of had a decent chancet at breaking in he would of been hard to beat. But he didn't, and he ain't likely to get it now until they electrify hell.

I needed another lineman and I was just about to tell the Man to send me out one when Scarfe got me to put Regan on. We'd cleared up one morning and the men was hanging up their tools and taking off their overalls in the shop car. The night's work was all done and I was writing it up on the swindle sheet when Scarfe come up to the drafting table.

'I got a friend I want to get a job for, Jig. What's the chance of getting him into this train?'

'Is he a good lineman?'

'He's as good as I am on transmission work.'

'That'd be good enough for me if this was transmission work, Scarfe. But it ain't. How is he on catenary?'

'I don't think he ever worked none on railroad electrifyin'.'

'Then why don't he get him another job at tower building or wire stringing? They's plenty of that going on.'

Scarfe looks kind of funny. 'Well, Jig, I think it's his wife. All the transmission work's out in the sticks. I think she kind of likes to live near the bright lights, so he wants to get a job here.'

I was surprised to hear nonsense like that out of Scarfe. He's got right good sense. So I arced at him a little.

'I suppose if this guy's wife taken a notion she wanted to

see the West Coast, I'd have to take this wire train out there and electrify some of them redwood trees, wouldn't I?"

'Lay off it, Jig This guy's a friend of mine and needs a job bad.'

'Sounds to me like what he needs is a divorce or a club to beat some sense into that woman The whole rig's bum, Scarfe You say yourself this guy's never been in a wire train What good would he be to us out here rebuilding this interlocking at night while he was wondering which of them bright lights was shining down on his woman? You know what this job's like You can't afford to have a guy on it that's seeing blue eyes where he ought to be seeing red lights Don't look so huffy: I meant signal lights.'

'He's a good man, Jig I could carry him a few nights, and after he caught on he'd cut it fine'

'He might But I can get men that'll cut it fine the first night'

'Jig, I'd like it mighty well to .'

'Sorry, Scarfe. But as long as I can get men that know the difference between a cross-track feeder and a rivet gun, it's only fair to the company to do it. Sorry, but it's no dice.'

Just then the engineer come in for me to sign the release slip for the engine, and the other linemen scrambled out to ride it back to the transfer Scarfe he didn't go with 'em, though. He waited till they was all gone and him and me was the only ones left in the train Then he come over to me again

'Jig, I rigged this wrong. I should of knowed better and I'm sorry Now I want to tell you the truth about this Regan guy.'

'All right, Scarfe, let her rip'

'Me and Regan was buddies for years. Clumb buddies on half a dozen big transmission jobs He was as good a lineman as ever wore a belt, considering he was young Then he met up with a broad out there in the sticks where some guy had ditched her. He fell for her something awful

She seen he was making good money, so she marries him. He'd been shooting craps and he had a roll you could of used to guy a gin pole with. So she got him to quit his job and go to town to spend it. He done it. Then when his dough was gone and he wanted to look up another job and make some more she wouldn't leave town. He went off alone finally and come out to the job where I was at. He was useless; like to fell out of every tower he clumb. All the time he was worryin' about that woman. The Man finally canned him. But he goes down to the pool hall and knocks off another little roll with them dice. And then he goes back to his wife and they spend it. That's been going on now about three years. The reason he don't get a transmission job is he's blackballed with every company in this part of the country. I've got him into jobs before; he done fine with 'em till that woman got to bothering him, and then it's the same old story. I figured she'd quit him and so the best thing was just to let it drift till she did. But she ain't going to quit him. She ain't getting any younger or fancier and she knows how good them dice can treat him when they take the notion.'

'And he puts up with it?'

'Laps it up. He thinks the sun just comes out to light up them gold teeth of hers.'

'Somebody ought to lay her out real careful on a pile of broken bottles and run a steam roller over her a few times.'

'I'd like to burn her heart out with a steel torch, but I doubt if a torch'd cut into where it's at. That wouldn't do Regan no good, noway. He's still nuts about her and always will be till he gets over it by hisself. You can't say nothin' to him. I tried when he was first fixing to marry her. All that come of it was him pulling his pliers on me. Yes, he did—and him and me good friends, too. I taken his pliers away and throwed 'em out a window and told him to wise up. But he wouldn't wise up then, and he ain't since. And now he's in a bad way. His belt and tools is in hock, and unless you'll give him a chancet they might as well stay

there. I don't think he never worked at nothing but line work, and he wouldn't want to, noway '

'You say he's a good lineman.'

'Yes. He'll catch on to railroad work fast I think he might come out of it and get shut of this broad if he could get back on a good job again I hate to pester you about it, but it's serious. I kind of feel like it might be the last chance he'd ever get. I wasn't never going to say nothing about this, Jig, but I wouldn't be here talking to you if it wasn't for him He done me about the same kind of favour I done you last winter and . . .'

'O.K., Scarfe. I didn't know it was that serious with you '

Scarfe had done me what he called a favour. It was on a breakdown He'd clumb about forty yards through a mess of broke and burning wire a asbestos squirrel couldn't of crossed to where I was hanging in my belt so cold I didn't even know my overalls was on fire He beat out the fire and carried me over to a body beam, walking and crawling all the way along wire I wouldn't of hung a lunch bucket on. Him and me had beds side by side in the hospital for almost a month, but I never did learn the whole story till the day they come in to give him the medal

'Bing him out to-night, then But remember, I ain't promising to keep him unless he can cut it. I'd like to do you both a favour, now I know all about it, but this work's too risky to fool with a man that ain't on his toes '

'Much obliged, Jig I'll carry him till he gets going.'

## II

Regan come in with Scarfe that night about ten-thirty. He was a nice-looking guy, not big like Scarfe, but not no runt. He looked soft like he hadn't been working for a while, but he had a kind of a good-natured face and good steady eyes. And he had a way about him I liked, not nervous or jerky, but quick and easy-moving. You could

see he was a lineman right off; he walked like one and he talked like one.

'I guess Scarfe told you,' he says to me, 'I ain't never been in no wire train before.'

'Yeah. Ever use steel skates?'

'No. I never clumb no steel pole in my life. I've used wood hooks a bit, though, and clumb some towers.'

'Well, don't try no steel skates at night. You can practise on 'em in the mornings after the sun's up till you get used to 'em. In the meantime you just do what work they is to be done on the decks of the tower cars or off the ladders. I guess you've worked off ladders, ain't you?'

'Yeah. Plenty in transmission work.'

'All right. Working on these decks will be new to you. Watch out you don't trip on some of the scrap hardware and spill off the top. It's a long fall down to the tracks when them towers are pulled up. Have you worked much around hot wire?'

'I've worked twenty-threc and forty-four and sixty-six hundred with rubber gloves. And I've worked clearance rigs on transmission crossings. What's the voltage here?'

'Fourteen thousand. We work it all on a time-clearance basis. Most of this railroad yard has to be hot for service all but a few hours of every night. So don't never go up on deck till I've told you the wire's dead and you've saw the ground sticks on it. And when me or Beckett, the straw boss, says, "Everybody down!" that's what it means. If you fool around on deck after hearing that, you'll find yourself about half cooked before you ever get to hell. And remember, even when we got the power out on one section of wire, all the other wire in the yard will most likely be hot. You keep close to Scarfe. He knows every kilowatt in this yard by its front name and he'll keep you away from them.'

'Yes, sir.'

Regan was all right. He was green at catenary, but you can't expect a man to come right off transmission work and savvy a railroad job the first night. It's too different. In

transmission work you just got towers to build or wire to string out over open country You can start out in the morning and work till your tail drags with nothing to bother you. In railroad work you always got to wait till you can get the use of the track And in a hot yard you got to wait till track and power clearance synchronize. And then you got to get your train moved in to where you want it, your towers pulled up to the right level, your deck lights set, and your men to work And you got to do it fast. And you got to keep your work in hand so that you can tie it up quick and get your train out faster than you taken it in if the signal tower suddenly needs your track to handle traffic on.

Regan wasn't used to rawhiding the work for short shots and then having nothing to do, but he caught on fast and he was smart about planning his work so he wouldn't never foul us if we had to move sudden And he was a good line-man. He could handle a rope or walk wire or steel or hang off a ladder with anyone He clumb nice, too—quick, light-footed, and easy-moving He wasn't used to working at night with only flood lights for light, but he never said nothing about it, and in a couple of nights he was running around in the dark like a mole

And if he was green on catenary he made up for it by hard work He was always the first guy to follow me and Beckett on deck when the train stopped at a new place He'd be the first guy to grab a hook ladder when I put the spotlight up on some work that couldn't be reached from the deck. He was handy about stretching out the blocks when we was getting ready to tension. And he was quick to help swing out a outrigger when we had to lay on one track and do our work out over the next one He never batted a eye about working on that outrigger The first time he seen us use one, it wasn't no more than locked in its sturups when he walks out on it. I calls to him.

'Regan, hook your belt on that messenger wire. You're just about six foot above the smokestack of any freight that



wants to go under you there. If it taken a notion to puff just right, it'd knock you and that outrigger, too, three foot in the air.'

'I figured if one come under me I'd just step clear of the outrigger and stand on the wire till it went by.'

'That's right. But keep your belt hooked over the wire. That's what you're wearing it for.'

'Yes, sir.'

A freight did take a blast at him that same night and knocked him off the wire, but his belt held him all right. And when it was over he just went back to work, not paying no more attention to it than he done to the way the other guys kidded him.

Scarfe helped him a lot. Them two was real buddies. Before Regan come along, Scarfe he'd always been a loner. He was as good a lineman as I ever seen, but he mostly worked alone and he didn't hang out none with the other guys offen the job. I figured he might of been born that way or he might of had him a buddy got killed. But when Regan come to work and I seen them two together I knowed why Scarfe hadn't never paired up with no one else. Him and Regan worked together all the time and they was a sweet pair. What Regan didn't know about catenary Scarfe did, and he learnt Regan fast. They'd arc at each other all the time.

'All right, Mr. Scarfe, if you stand there much longer your feet'll grow roots right down through the deck!'

'Well, just as quick as you get your hand out of the company's pocket and get up that ladder I'll hand you these blocks!'

Regan was good about the hot wire, too. Anybody's apt to be nervous around hot wire. And they was many a night's work in that yard we done with the gang just eighteen inches from a look at the Holy Ghost. But Regan didn't mind it, and he wasn't careless, neither. He'd look it all over in that calm way he had and then he'd get in good position and go right to work on the cold side of a set of

insulators just as steady as if he'd never heard of a lineman burning up. He watched close how we put the ground sticks on to protect us, and when he come up on deck after us he taken Scarfe aside.

'This wire running right across the deck here is the one we seen the ground sticks put on, ain't it?'

'Yeah It's dead You noticed how Jig put his hand on it when we first come up, didn't you?'

'Yeah But how about them insulators down there by the end of the deck behind Beckett?'

'That's a air break—cold on this side, hot on the other. That's what Beckett's standing there for, so no one won't forget and reach or walk past them insulators.'

'I wouldn't put my hands acrost no insulators in this yard if I seen a bolt bag full of gold pieces hanging on the other side!'

I noticed when we holed up in a siding after that first shot Regan he borrows a blueprint off me and, instead of spending the slack time drinking coffee and throwing water and rough-housing like the other guys done, he got Scarfe to explain a air break to him and to learn him off the prints about sectionalizing circuits. In the morning after we'd cleared up and the other guys had went home, Regan takes a pair of skates out of the shop car and puts in about a hour of his own time practising climbing a pole with 'em. In a few days he could run up and down a steel pole like a shadow.

### III

In short, Regan caught hold good, and after a few nights Scarfe come around to see me again

'Well, what do you think of my boy, Regan?'

'He's still here, ain't he?'

'Yeah. I knowed you wouldn't fire him when you seen how good he is.'

'You was right about him. He's a lineman and he's going to be a good catenary lineman How's his home life coming?'

'He's still living with that woman And he won't say no more about it than he ever would, so I guess she's got him down as bad as ever. But that don't bother you, does it?'

'Hell, no It ain't my business, just so he comes in here sober at night As long as his work lasts like this, he's O K with me '

It lasted till the night after he drawed his first pay. If him and his woman was fighting before that, they wasn't no sign of it on the job and that was all I give a damn about. Pay night was a Saturday It was a good one, too We'd had some overtime and they must of been right close to a hundied bucks in the linemen's envelopes. When I give Regan his, he taken a look at the amount where it's wrote on the outside and guns

'Thanks, Jig '

'Nothing to thank me for, Regan. You earned it. And if you keep on like you been doing, you'll earn a lot more like it '

As luck would have it, the railroad was running a lot of Sunday excursions to the seashore that morning, and after about three-ten we couldn't get no track at all. I had the engineer run us up on a siding and I hung the train up for the night. I put the boys to work cleaning up tools, inspecting and reeving blocks, and generally overhauling our equipment. But they wasn't a night's work in that, and a little after five o'clock we was done. Beckett he takes out his pay and looks at it.

'That either ain't enough or it's too much! Shoot a fiver, Joel!'

'Wait a minute,' I says. 'If you guys want to shoot craps in here, I'll go over to the office. Keep a good look-out, though.'

I'd signed the engine off, so I didn't go back to the train till about seven. All but Scarfe had rode the engine in.

'Well, who done the winning?'

'Beckett and Paul Renford. The rest of us lost our shirts '

'Somebody's got to if anyone wins. Regan lose too?'

'Yeah. They dry-cleaned him '

'How'd he take it?'

'Good He don't never squawk over losing His woman will, though She'll holler till her teeth get hot '

I don't know how much hollering she done, but that night Regan come in to the train with a black eye It wasn't one of them real good ones that come free with a quart of whisky and a loose tongue, but it was black, all right His hands wasn't cut or bruised none, neither, so I just knowed where that black eye come from They ain't many men around could of give Regan a black eye and kept from bruising his hands too I didn't say nothing about it, but of course the other guys kidded him He didn't seem to mind it none; he just taken it with a kind of a foolish grin until Joe Mitchell made that wise crack

'How did you say you got it now, Regan? You've told us so many ways I've forgot which of 'em you meant.'

Regan grins so no one wouldn't take it serious and says:

'Oh, I got it off a swinging door '

Joe he looks at it real close. 'Looks to me more like it was a swinging whore!'

And then Joe was picking himself up off the floor and it looked mean till I got between 'em

'If you guys want to fight, just wait till I write out your time!'

Joe he spits out a tooth and some blood and I guess he would of went for Regan if he hadn't saw I had my pliers out.

'I ain't looking for no fight, but it's a hell of a note when you can't make a good-natured crack without a guy getting sore and busting your teeth out!'

'Just one tooth!' I says. 'Regan, are you through fighting or do you want me to fire you so you can spend the whole night at it?'

'Naw,' says Regan. 'I don't want to fight no more But if any of the rest of you guys want to pop off at me about this lamp, make sure it's *me* you're kidding.'

Joe he was a pretty decent guy 'If I'd knowed it was a

broad give it to you, Regan, I wouldn't of said that. If you want to fight some more, I'll meet you anywhere you say, but if you don't, it suits me.'

'Forget it, Joe. I'm sorry I got so hot. I should of knowed you didn't mean nothing by it.'

So that was that, and them two didn't fight no more.

#### IV

But they was more wrong with Regan than that eye. I found it out directly we went to work. About one-twelve the special-duty man come in and says we can have one of the new tracks all night and a twenty-five-minute shot on another right off. I told him to take us out and uncouple so we could leave one tower car and half the gang with the all-night job and then I'd take the engine and the other tower car and the rest of the outfit and cruise around the yard working when and where we could.

I left Beckett with some of the guys where they was a lot of work could be done in one place. I left Joe Mitchell with him. And I taken the other half of the outfit and Regan with me. It don't never do no harm to keep two guys that just been fighting from working too close to each other till you're sure they really are made up.

Regan he wasn't worth his weight in broke insulators. He fouled up the blocks every time we went to use 'em. He cut a piece of auxiliary wire before I even had time to mark it, so it was just the grace of God we didn't have to run in a new piece two hundred yards long. He put a pair of pull-off bars on upside down so they would of tore the smoke-stack off a locomotive, let alone the pantograph off a electric, and he just generally fouled the whole job.

If we'd been working on stuff that was new to him I wouldn't of said nothing. But this was just the same kind of work we'd been doing all week and he should of knowed better. I told him so, too, and he just nods kind of listless-like and says he's sorry.

About four o'clock we got a few minutes in the clear and I sent the men down into the shop car to eat. That is, all but Regan. He was just finishing wire-locking a crossover when I had to move the train, so I left him out on it, and as soon as we got the track again I run the train back in under him and picked him up. Then I sent him down to eat. In a minute I went down to the shop car to get a blueprint and there sat Regan drinking coffee but not eating nothing

'You better eat your dinner, son We're going to work right through till seven-fifty-six this morning'

'I ain't got it with me, Jig. I'll make out all right with just some coffee.'

'How come you ain't got it with you? If it's over in Beckett's half, go after it You can walk over there in a few minutes and no one wants to work on a empty gut.'

'No. It ain't over there I didn't bring it out with me. I'll make out all right without none. I ain't so hungry to-night'

I starts to ask him why he'd come out without a dinner, and then I remembered His woman had been too busy blacking his eye to make him up a dinner. So I says to him

'They's a couple of extra sandwiches in mine I ain't going to eat Help yourself to 'em'

I almost had to force him to take 'em But when he did he forgot about not being hungry and eat 'em like he hadn't saw no food for a week

Eating didn't help him none, though. All the rest of that night he was dopey If we'd been working real close to anything hot I'd of sent him down off the deck till we got it done. But we wasn't Down on them new tracks where we was you could get a lot of clearance all around you And what with having a fight in the train, and it being the night after pay, I told the special-duty man to keep us there all night It ain't always you can work like that. Mostly you got to expect your gang to be just as good one night as the next or fire them that ain't. But this was a long job and we

was working seven nights a week on it. And when you're running a show like that it pays you to use your head about timing the work to suit the men as much as you can. Regan and Joe wasn't neither of them sore-heads, and I figured that by the next night the whole outfit would be steadied down all right.

## v

They was, too, all but Regan. He was just as useless as he'd been the night before. He just set around when we was cleared up like he was sulking to hisself. It wasn't over Joe, neither. Him and Joe spoke to each other civil when they come in that night and they buddied about carrying some rolls of guy wire over to the train before we went out to work.

When we got out to work, Regan was the first guy to follow me and Beckett on deck, but up there he didn't seem to do no good. And that night we was out where it was hot all around us. We was working on Four, which wasn't hot, of course. Out in mid-span we had about eleven foot clearance from Three and Five, which was hot as the devil's fork. But they was places at the cross spans, and where a couple of crossovers run through Four, that wasn't eighteen inches from the kilowatts. And that's no place for a man that ain't got his whole mind on the work.

I watched Regan close to see if he'd snap out of it. He didn't do nothing wrong I could put my finger on, but he didn't snap out of it, neither, so I says:

'Boys, I want all but Scarfe and Paul and Beckett to lay back when we come to these spans and crossover breaks. Three men's enough to do all we got to do there, and it's too close to the hot to have a bunch hanging around. You other guys do the work out in the mid-spans.'

That suited everyone and it give Regan less chance of hurting hisself or someone else. But at that he like to kilt us all.

Out in one of the spans of Four they was a crossover dead

end running diagonal across the span and about ten foot above deck level. It was red hot and we couldn't get power clearance on it. We had to go in under it to work, but before I run the train in there I says to the gang:

'Boys, they's a hot one crossing over above us in here. We got plenty of clearance to keep under it if we take it easy and work low. But remember it's right up there all the time even if the lights don't show it. I don't want no one to climb up on the messenger or even to pick a ladder up off the deck. And anyone waves a hanger rod or tie wire over his head might just as well be waving to the undertaker to come get him. We're going in now. *watch the move!*'

The engineer run us in under there nice and easy and we went to work. For a few minutes the gang done fine. We was putting on hangers and the men kept them copper rods down low till the tops of them was tight to the messenger and couldn't get up to kiss the kilowatts above us. And they was good about handling the tie wire in rolls instead of cutting it off in lengths. We got the span tailored in good shape and I goes down to the end of the deck to sight it. The hangers mostly fit nice. In all but one place that riding wire was flat enough to of rode a pantograph a hundred miles an hour. One hanger was about a half inch short, though. The men was stationed along the length of the deck standing back from the wire so I could see it to sight it. They was out of the light and I couldn't see who was nearest the short hanger, so I says

'Somebody take that fourth hanger off. Put a longer one on there and tie it till I can sight it and tell you where to cut it.'

Regan was nearest to it. Instead of taking the old hanger down first, he stoops over to the deck and grabs a long section of new hanger rod. As he come up with it he swings it way up over his head. I couldn't do nothing. I would of throwed my pliers at him, but I was fifty foot down the deck, and even if I hit him square on the head it probably wouldn't stop the lifting motion of that hanger in time. So I hollers,



'Flash!' and threw myself face down on the deck. It wouldn't help Regan none if I got my eyes burnt out watching it. The other boys had all saw it and I heard them hitting the deck as I did. I closed my eyes and wondered if they was a scrap of tie wire or a drop cord touching me, but I knowed better than to look.

Then they was a hell of a crash up the deck, but no flash or stink, and no crack like a breaker switch makes when a hot one bites something. I looks up and there was Regan sprawled out on deck with the hanger still in his hand and Scarfe on top of him. The other men begun to look up and wipe the sweat off their faces, and Scarfe he gets up off Regan kind of slow, like he was tired, and wipes his face.

'Scarfe, how far did you have to jump to get to Regan?'

'I don't know. I didn't stop to figure.'

'He was standing right by me,' says Beckett. 'I thought of jumping and figured they wasn't time.'

We figured it up, and Scarfe he'd jumped about seven foot. He'd started that jump just when the rest of us figured it was hopeless and ducked to save ourselves. And he hadn't knowed for the whole of them seven feet that them kilowatts wasn't coming to meet him, let alone be there waiting for him if he was late. I doubt if they was six inches between the end of that hanger and the hot crossover when he hit Regan and knocked him and the hanger down. Regan he'd cut his cheek a little when they hit the deck, and the way the blood stood out on the white of his face was a sight.

'Scarfe,' he says, 'I'm much obliged to you.'

'All right,' says Scarfe.

I couldn't let it go that easy, though. It was too close.

'Regan, go down to the shop car and iodine that cut. And then you can wait there till I come down.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Boys, I ain't got much to say about what just happened. You all seen it and you know as well as I do how close it was. And you know where most of us'd be if it wasn't for Scarfe.'

Let's not have no next time Now, a couple of you get a hanger on there and let's get this span done '

Some of the guys put a hanger on, and Scarfe he followed me down the deck to where I was sighting it

'Let Beckett sight that, Jig I want to talk to you a second.'

'Sight this, Beckett, and then move the train down under the beam and start the outfit riveting '

Beckett nods, and Scarfe and me slip off to a corner of the deck out of the way of the work

'Jig, I want you to give Regan another chancet '

'I figured you would That's how come me not to fire him right where he done it But it's a serious business, Scarfe If it hadn't been for what you done, our shop-car boy and the grunts would still be clearing the burnt meat off the deck I don't want to can Regan, but you can't have stuff like that going on '

'You ain't going to have it going on He's got good sense. He seen what happened and he'll be all the better for being that close to a burning. It takes something strong to make a impression on a guy with a woman like that on his mind He's had it, and he'll do all right now '

'I ain't thinking so much about him as about the rest of the gang If he was the only one he could hurt, it wouldn't matter. But he ain't. They's at least three good women I know of come within six inches of being widows to-night just over Regan having his mind on that broad of his. You know that ain't right.'

'I know it. And you got a right to can him if you want. But if you'll give him one more chancet I'll see he either snaps out of it—or quits before he does hurt someone '

'Well, I'll have a talk with him. I've give him some time to be thinking this over and maybe he'll be ready to talk sense '

'I'm right obliged to you, Jig '

I went down and had a talk with him. I didn't cuss him, but I talked to him stuff And he taken it good He was sorry and he knowed I had a right to can him. I told him

I didn't want to can him, but I'd have to unless he come out of it and done better. I told him he was a good enough lineman to know this ain't a job for a man that can't keep his mind on it. He nods and then he looks at me kind of funny.

'Jig, was you ever married?'

'Hell, no. And I never fell off no real high pole, neither. But if I did I'd try not to hit the guys under me as I come down.'

He caught right on. He didn't say nothing for a minute or two, and then he nods.

'I see what you mean. I'll try to do better.'

'You'll have to do better if you're going to stay here. I got no kick on your work when you keep your mind on it; it's good. But you either got to get shut of whatever's worrying you or get shut of the job.'

'I been worrying about private affairs, Jig. If it come to what you say, I'd have to get shut of the job. But if you'll give me another chancet I think I can run 'em both all right.'

'One more, then. And I want to see you make out with it.'

He thanked me so hard I hated to hear it. And for a while after that he done fine. He'd caught on a lot to railroad work now, and him and Scarfe was as good a pair as I ever worked. They wasn't no crap game in the train the night after the next pay, neither. I don't never mind a gang shooting craps if they ain't no work to be done. But I seen what come of that last game and I told the boys they'd have to do their crap shooting off the job. And so that week Regan taken his money home. At least I judge he taken it home, because the next night he had a good dinner with him and no black eye. And he kept his mind on his work.

## VI

The week after that we had a hell of a funny accident. It was the only one I ever knowed that was funny, but it was, though it like to scared us to death.

It must of been about four-ten in the morning We had the train laying right under a beam and was changing some messenger suspensions. Everything was dead and grounded in the section where we was The nearest hot wire to us was the hot side of a air break down under the signal bridge about a hundred yards away.

Well, about four-ten we heard a ruckus down near the signal bridge and some of them stray dogs that hang out by the slaughterhouse acrost the yard begun to bark like hell I couldn't figure it for a minute and then I caught on all of a sudden

'Get away from that wire, boys! Them dogs have chased a hobo up that signal bridge If he fouls that break, it might throw something back this way!'

The boys throwed themselves down on the deck, and one or two that was up the ladder clumb up on to the beam and laid out on that where they'd be out of the way if a wire burnt through. I throwed the spotlight on the signal bridge, but it was so far I couldn't see the hobo at all If it hadn't been the signal bridge I wouldn't of knowed what it was, cause a hobo don't go around carrying steel skates so he can get up a pole when dogs chase him But on the signal bridge they was ladder steps all the way up from the ground, and a kid could of clumb it. They was hot wire all over that bridge, too—jumper loops offen the signal circuit, and feeder taps and short air breaks and any amount of other junk. It would of been a bum place for a lineman that knowed his stuff to be fooling around in the dark.

'They's fourteen thousand volts of juice all over that signal bridge, hobo! Stand still till I come down there with a light and run them dogs off, and I'll show you how to get down alive!'

He didn't answer, but them dogs barked worse than ever. Beckett he speaks up

'He thinks you're a railroad dick and if he answers he's jail bait'

'He's hearsc bait if he fools around that bridge. And this

train's got to move out of here in three minutes. Renford, get that ladder down and then move the train back to the siding. And keep the men away from that wire. Beckett, you and Scarfe come with me and we'll see if we can get this tramp down before he kills himself!

We run most of the way. I got no special use for hoboes, but they ain't no sense in letting a guy burn himself up just because he thinks you're the law and is scared to come down out of a death trap like that. But we was too late. We was still about thirty yards from the bridge when a breaker switch lets go like a load of dynamite. We couldn't see the hobo in the flash and we didn't hear his body hit the ground, though we knowed the surge must of knocked it loose of the contact or the breaker would of blowed again. But the wind was blowing our way, and the first whiff that got to us after that breaker blowed settled it. You don't forget that smell.

Well, we got to the bridge and looked all around under it, but we couldn't find no body. The dogs had run off when the breaker blowed. I put my light on the bridge, but I couldn't see nothing up there, so I clumb up and looked at every lead on it. I found where the flash had been, all right. They was a broke bell in a set of flash-scarred insulators. But they wasn't no sign of a body nowhere and we couldn't figure that out. Fourteen thousand'll tear a man up something awful if it hits him right, or again you got to look his body over close to find where the contact was. It's freakish stuff, but at that I never heard of it carrying no one off. And it wasn't no kite blowed into that wire, neither. A kite don't smell like that.

I clumb down again and stood there talking to Scarfe about it when Beckett give out a laugh.

'There's your hobo!'

I looks where he's holding his light, and there was the head and shoulders of a cat. That was all they was left of it. The rest of it, I guess, was blowed all over the yard. All the fur was burnt off the part we seen. It was ugly, but it was better to look at than a dead hobo.

We all stood there and laughed at it. We'd been tensioned up tight, thinking it was a man.

'Them dogs run him up there,' says Scarfe, 'and somehow he slipped acrost them insulators. We'll never know how.'

'Who cares how?' asks Beckett. 'I don't, and I bet that cat don't, neither. He ain't never going to be hungry again, nor have to scratch around on rainy nights to get food, nor let them tabby cats worry him, neither. His troubles is over, quick and painless.'

Scarfe he give a start. He don't say nothing for a second, and then he says kind of low, like he was talking to hisself:

'Yeah. That's one cure for any trouble.'

It struck me odd, Scarfe being so serious about a stray old cat, but I didn't have time to think about it before the gang come up bringing a stretcher. They wasn't serious. They laughed like hell when they seen how we was fooled. Beckett he says we ought to fill out a real accident report and send it to the head office—fill it out like it was a lineman named 'A. Cat.'

'How would you fill in that part where it says "Remarks"?' asks Scarfe. He wasn't so serious now the other guys had come up and was standing there laughing.

Beckett thought a minute. 'That wouldn't have nothing to do with it. Just fill that part in like you generally do it. "Remarks. None".'

So we throwed what was left of the cat back in the bushes and went on back to the train.

## VII

Pay day come again, and the night after it Regan come in without no dinner. He had a long scratch on the side of his face, too. When we got our first shot he put his belt on upside down and all the tools fell out around his feet. He wouldn't even of knowed it if Beckett hadn't arced at him to pick 'em up and get conscious. Up on deck I watched him like a hawk, and I didn't have to watch long. We was

tensioning, and the first thing Regan does is put a little set of four-inch blocks across a splice where he knowed damned well he was going to have a pulling load of about five thousand pounds. Scarfe seen him do it and tried to get them blocks off before I seen it. But when he seen I seen it, he just turns away and shakes his head.

'Regan, you go down to the shop car and help the shop-car boy make up them pull-off straps to-night.'

'Yes, sir.'

Scarfe taken me aside after Regan had gone.

'I'm right obliged to you for not just firing him right up here where everyone could hear it.'

'I hate it, Scarfe. I like that boy and I'd like to keep him. But you seen that last stunt yourself; I'll just have to give him his time in the morning. It ain't fair to him nor to the others to keep him. It could only end one way.'

'Yeah,' says Scarfe. 'Only one way.'

He stood there for a while after that, keeping out of the way of the rest of the gang, and I didn't bother him. He thought a lot of Regan and he felt bad about it. I did, too. I guess I felt worse for Scarfe than I did for Regan himself. But by and by Scarfe come out of it, and, if he was kind of quiet, he did put out a good night's work. Then about four o'clock he comes up to me.

'Jig, you going to make that change at the signal bridge?'

'I was going to, but I ain't sure now, Scarfe. I can't get power clearance under there for twenty minutes, and I'll only get a fifteen-minute shot then. If I could spare a couple of men to get everything rigged and ready in advance, I could make it. But I'm afraid I'll have to let it go till to-morrow night.'

'I'll rig it for you, Jig.'

'One man ain't enough, and that's all I can spare.'

'Let me take Regan. He's still on the pay roll.'

'It's too risky. Everything down there's still red hot.'

'He'll do all right with me, Jig. I know him, and I can take care of him and rig it right, too.'

'Well, I'd like to get that done to-night, Scarfe, but . . .'

'Jig, let me do it. Regan and me are buddies. I know he's done, but he and I seen each other through a lot of tough places and I'd like to see him through one more. This is likely his last job and I'd like to work with him one more time.'

'All right. Want a helper to carry your stuff?'

'No. I'd rather it was just him and me. We ain't got so much stuff to carry.'

I walks down to the signal bridge with 'em and showed 'em what I wanted done. Regan he still seemed kind of dopey, though he looks at me and paid close attention when I was warning him about the hot wire. And he clumb all right.

I watched 'em till they'd got up on to the bridge and pulled their ladder up. And then I hollered to 'em to watch the hot stuff all the time, and I starts back over to the train to see if Beckett had the tensioning done. I was just wondering if I done right to trust Regan at all when I heard the breaker switch blow. . . .

As I run, all I could think of was if I'd fired Regan right off the deck in the first place Scarfe would be still alive. But when I got there Scarfe was still alive. He'd clumb down off the bridge and picked up Regan from where he fell and carried him over to the side of the track. When I come up he was just standing there looking at him.

I put my flashlight on Regan, and then I shut it off and taken off my overall jumper and throwed it over his face. I put my light on Scarfe, and then I taken it off him, too. He was all right. His overalls was singed and his eyebrows and lashes was burned off, but it was more than that made me take my light off him. It was something in his face. He didn't say nothing and neither did I. We could hear the other guys coming and see their lights bobbing as they run. And then Scarfe give a kind of a cry.

'I got to tell you, Jig. I got to tell you the truth . . .'

I cracks him hard acrost the face with my open hand.



'Buck up, Scarfe They ain't nothing to tell We both seen this poor guy trip and fall acrost that wire. Lots of accidents happen that way. "Remarks: None "'

He taken a long breath and kind of shook hisself And then just before the other guys come up he says

'I guess you're right. Thanks, Jig.'

## *The Double House*

BY NANCY HALE

(From *Vanity Fair*)

THE little boy, whose name was Robert, used sometimes to think how horrid their house would be if his father did not live in it. It was half a house, nobody lived in the other side. In the middle of the house as you came towards it there were the two front doors set side by side. There were shutters on the windows of their side of the house, and the door was painted green, but the empty half had blank staring windows and a rusty-coloured door, the low cellar windows, flush with the ground, were broken, and Virginia creepers ran into the holes and disappeared.

Robert used to think, as he came home from school, how ugly the house looked, and how hopeless and sad. He tried not to let his father know he knew it was not a very nice house because he had an idea that it was the best house his father was able to get for them and his aunt Esther, his father's sister, to live in. He imagined that his father did not think it was very nice either, at least it was so different from that house in the stories his father told him of the days when he had been a little boy. But he did not want to speak about it, because it might make his father unhappy, and at the possibility of his father's unhappiness Robert felt a sense of terror. It was only because his father was such a happy man that life was possible at all.

Aunt Esther was always weary and gloomy. She was kind too, but she wept if she listened to the stories of the days when she and Robert's father were children, and that was why the stories were never told when she was around, any more. She wanted to be good to her nephew, but Robert tried not to be alone with her since the time, about a year ago, when he was ten, that she had looked at him with tears in her eyes, and shaken her head, and said that he was lucky to be a child, for childhood was the only happy time. At that Robert's heart

had stood still with fear, for if it were true that he would never be any happier than he was now, then he was lost.

So when he came home from school every afternoon he could not bear to go directly into the house, but cut off at the side of the house and went around to the back, on the empty side, where a cellar window was so broken that he could get himself through the hole. He would come walking down the street in the late afternoon sunlight, in the crisp autumn air, with a strap around his books and the end of the strap in his hand, alone, small and thin, with his coat buttoned up the front; he would turn and walk up the unsodded ground to his front steps and put his books on the steps and then go around to the back and slide on his back through the broken cellar window that was the way into the empty, silent, cold half of the house.

He had brought in some of the books his father gave him, and he would sit on top of the old deserted bureau in one of the dead musty bedrooms, in the late sunshine of those afternoons and read the books, wearing his coat buttoned up in the cold. He had brought in his paintbox, and with some water in one of the jelly-glasses and a brush he sometimes coloured the illustrations in the books, or made pictures of his own on the fly-leaves or on a pad of school paper. He did not like his pictures. He knew that they were all wrong, and he hoped it was true that, as his father said, people got better at doing things as they grew older. If that were not true then, he thought, he was lost, for he was weak, and different, and the other boys hated him, and he could not even paint nice pictures. But his father had told him that it was true, and that things got much better as people grew older, and Robert believed him, for he could see that his father was a happy man.

He knew that this late afternoon life in the empty half of the house was the only life he lived on his own resources, and he saw that it was not much of a life to make for himself and that it was lonely and pathetic. He detested himself for his shyness and his queeriness and unhappiness and unimport-

ance, but he could not do anything about it any more than if it had been a sickness. He used to think, I must just hang on and get through things until I grow up and then everything will be better.

When the sun went down he would go away from the darkening upstairs room where he had been playing and go down through the cellar to get out. The cellar would be pitch-dark and frightening, and sometimes one of the cobwebby ropes hanging from the cellar beams would sway against his head as he passed; he was in a hurry to crawl through the broken window and get out of that dreadful cellar, although he loved the place too, because it was the only place he could think of to himself as being his own.

He would go around in the early chilling dusk to the front of the house, and sit on the steps watching the men come up the street from the train. After a while his father would come along, and Robert used to notice that although he walked heavily and stoop-shouldered further down the street, as soon as he saw his son he would straighten up and walk faster, waving his rolled-up paper at Robert and smiling through the twilight.

'Hello, Robbie, old boy,' his father would shout at him. He was a stoutish, thick man with a moustache, and he wore a black overcoat with a velvet collar. He would give Robert a little slap on the back and they would walk up to the house hand-in-hand, his father already starting on stories of what had happened at the office. Robert would squeeze his father's hand and look up at him, and his father would squeeze his hand back and say, 'Don't look so glum, old man. Everything's all right, isn't it?' and Robert would say, 'Sure. Fine.'

The rest of the day was always happy, once Robert's father had come home. They all had supper in the warm yellow light of the kitchen, and his father would eat a lot of everything and make jokes and josh his sister Esther along, while Robert ate his supper and listened, and felt safe and gay. His father made such a lot of noise and was so cheerful that everything they did in the evening seemed exciting and

successful. Sometimes he read poetry aloud, and at those times Robert could see that he was moved, but there was nothing miserable about it, but a kind of glorious, joyful sadness, and his father would say, 'Gee. That always gets me,' as he laid the book down. Everything was all right; the house was nice, the light was warm, the fire crackled, and the evenings were long and happy, because Robert's father was there. Robert used to kiss his father when he went up to bed, although he knew it was supposed to be sissy; his father's moustache felt big and bristly, and his father would give him another slap and say, while Robert's ear was still very close, 'Good-night, old man. Everything's fine. You're just like me, you know, and all you have to do is just keep plugging along.'

Robert's father always used to walk to the station via Robert's school, a little out of his way, and leave him at the corner of the school street. It was a nice walk that led through the little graveyard next to the stone church, and along a broad sunny street. It seemed sometimes to Robert that his father walked very slowly, and he worried about that; it made him feel terror to think that perhaps his father was getting old.

One morning as they were going along one of the paths of the graveyard, Robert's father saw a small red flower growing inside one of the iron-fenced enclosures. Robert was in a botany class at school, and his father had been interested in the specimens the pupils were supposed to collect, and had given him tips about where to go to look for them. Now he stopped short. 'Let's rob a grave, Robbie, shall we?' He made it sound wicked and exciting. He lay, stout and awkward, down upon the ground and reached in for the flower, and brought it out and got up, red in the face. 'There, now, you take that to class and knock all their eyes out,' he said. 'That's a rare one. They'll all be jealous.' Robert took it in his hand, looking at his father and unable to say anything. He was so touched by his father's helping him, and yet he knew so well that he would not knock their eyes out, that if

anything they would only find his new flower an excuse for laughing at him.

They walked on again. At the corner of the street they parted as usual, with a slap on Robert's back. As soon as he was alone Robert could feel the old fear and desperation come into his heart, and he looked back for one last sight of his father. He saw his father's heavy back going down the street, and for a minute he imagined that there was a slump, a tired look to his father's walk now that his father had left him. Then he went on to school, with his face set, holding on to his book-strap tight, and with the flower in his other hand.

School was a sort of nightmare broken by little intervals of hope. When he went into a class-room he always half-imagined that someone might call out for him to come and sit next to him. But no one ever did, nor was this day an exception. His find of a new flower was praised in botany class by the teacher, and for that half-hour he felt a little rise of pride, and of the interest that his father had made him feel for the subject. The teacher asked him to stay a minute after class, and talked to him about botany in appreciation of his response.

That class was followed by recess, and as Robert walked out into the big dirt yard he passed one of the other boys in his class. The boy stared at him 'Hello, Daisy,' he said. Two minutes later another group of boys called him 'Daisy.' 'Shut up,' Robert said to the boy nearest him, who was grinning into his face. 'Make me,' the boy said. Robert hit him in the face, and a minute later he felt hard, gritty dirt in his mouth, before he realized that he had been knocked down. The other boy was on him holding his shoulders down. 'Daisy, Daisy, Daisy,' he chanted. 'Robert brought a Daisy to Tea-cher.' Robert struggled wildly, crazy with rage; then the after-recess bell rang, and the other boy jumped off him and ran off without a word. Robert got up and went in to class.

It was one of the worst days for him. When he came out to the cloak room at the end of school to get his coat, he could

not find his cap on its hook. Then he saw that two boys at the end of the hall were throwing it between them for a ball. 'Let's have the cap,' Robert called, walking over as he put on his coat. They stared at him for a moment, and then, suddenly laughing, ran out of the door and into the yard with the cap, and Robert ran after them. It seemed to him that he ran and ran and ran, round and round the schoolhouse, hopelessly, never catching up to the two boys, who at length dropped it on the dirt, stamped hastily on it, and ran off. Robert picked it up and started home.

He seemed to feel a little lonelier than ever in the cold, secret playrooms of the empty half of the house. He sat on the old bureau and wondered dully when things would begin to get better for him. He felt a tired, hopeless acceptance of his own queerness, his weakness and difference from other boys. Sitting there, his mind drifted off into one of its dreams of being strong and powerful and brilliant, of being safe and unassailable. From that it was all the more bitter to come back into the dim, lonely reality of the barren room, with his books, his paintbox and efforts at making pictures scattered dismally about the floor. There was nothing in him that was a reason for his being alive in the world. After a while he went out, and down to the dreadful, black, unthinkable cellar; as a loop of the dusty ropes that hung from the beam slapped against his cheek in the dark he started and his heart stabbed with terror; he hurried out through the broken window and went around to sit on the front steps, wanting his father more than ever.

But his father seemed to be longer in coming than ever before. The other men all came up from the station in a straggling procession which dwindled and ended. His father had not come. Robert felt a kind of panic. He felt burning, wild tears behind his eyes. He felt sure that something horrible had happened to his father. He imagined that heavy, tired form run over by a truck, even run over by a train or fainting in the street, and the visions were too terrible to think of. After a while he could not bear it, and wandered

down the street in the darkening twilight, staring and staring ahead of him for the sight of that familiar approaching bulk. But the street was empty. People were having their suppers in their lighted houses on either side of him, but still his father did not come. Suddenly he turned and ran home as fast as he could, holding back the sobs in his throat. He fell, and scraped his hands on the dirty pavement, and got up and ran on, into the house, into the kitchen, to Aunt Esther. 'He hasn't come,' he burst out. 'Something's happened to him.' His aunt looked at his wild little thin face. 'Oh, it's all right, Robert,' she said. 'He's missed his train, that's all. He's done it before.' He sat down on a chair and kept still, listening and listening.

When he heard the front door open he dashed out and hurled himself at his father in the dark hall. 'Oh,' he sobbed, unable to keep from crying, 'I thought something had happened to you.' He could not speak any more. His father switched on the light. 'Why, you poor old boy,' he said in his big safe voice. 'There, There.' He cleared his throat, curiously. 'I missed the silly old train, that's all, Robbie, old scout. Buck up. You poor old man. Now then, go upstairs and wash those black hands of yours and come down and we'll have supper.' But Robert clung to him for a moment longer, his arms around that large, solid bulk, his heart pounding in him. Then he ran upstairs.

He washed his hands for a long time, while he let his heart stop beating, and his great relief rolled over him in a lovely warm wave. His father was here, and so everything was all right. His father, whom he loved, and who was happy and strong, and his only promise of safety. His father, who said they were just alike, and so held out a reason for living to Robert. Everything was all right. Just keep plugging along. Everything will get better as soon as I get older, Robert thought, in sheer relieved joy. My father says so. He wandered downstairs, and started back toward the kitchen.

But the voice he heard was so horribly like and unlike his father's that it stopped him short in his tracks. He could not



move, he could only listen to hear that dreadful sound again

'My God, I could almost give up,' this voice said

'But I thought everything was getting along well enough at the office,' his aunt's voice said trembling 'Was this the first you knew, that they were going to let you go?'

'Ych' Robert heard a long, heavy sigh. 'Sometimes I'd wish I were dead, if it wasn't for that poor old boy. Oh well.' There was a pause, and then Robert, shaking outside the door, heard one more sentence 'My God, Esther, how I wish we were children; we were happy then'

Robert turned, with his hands before him as if he were blind, and without will went to the front door, opened it, and found himself in the chilly night. He walked around to the back of the house and looked up at the sky as he walked, and saw it filled with brilliant and meaningless stars, and shut his eyes against them. He started to get into the hole that went into the empty cellar, and then sat for a moment half in and half out, with his mind throbbing like a wound. It seemed to him that this was the end of all happiness, of all hope. He began to cry, hysterically, and let himself on through the hole into the black, frightful cellar. Terror, and hopelessness, beat upon him like oceans, overcoming him. He stumbled in the darkness, until his clutching fingers felt one of the dangling ropes. As he fumbled at the loop he was sobbing crazily

## *A Distant Harbour*

BY PAUL HORGAN

(From *Direction*)

THE afternoon was late, and things on the other side of the basin dock were already in shadow, like smoke blown down to the water. But between me and the dark shore was a ship that made me stop with a look of delight. Here was a perfect piece of philosophy for my thoughts. It was an excursion boat, tied up at some rotting black piles. She was painted white, underneath the layers of grimy soot that had clung in the frost that covered her. Her hull was cut low with decks, like all passenger boats on the lake, and acres of brown canvas were lashed to her rails, her ports, her decks to keep the winter out. In black and white she lay there, riding through the long hibernation.

Without lights! I said to myself, without the band playing on the foredeck, with no fat captain in a grease-edged blue coat in her pilot house, with no shopgirls and their boys fighting for dark corners on the decks, with silent engines, and frozen rudder, she sits there waiting for spring and the hourly trips across the lake to Crystal Beach!

'Crystal Beach!' they had said an hour ago, while we sat talking on the waterfront, 'that is what we do all summer, you hate it while you're doing it, and damned if you don't miss it when you tie up in the Fall!'

They told me about the pier and the lights, and pointed out the dim pencil line on the far shore to show me Crystal Beach.

I sat down and stared at the steamer. On her stern was the name *Erie Queen*, and through the rift in her tarpaulin I could see slatted chairs folded and piled up in the shadows.

It was getting darker. A few lights came on, and played in loneliness upon the black water. I had found, I said, what I came for. Absolute peace and something to muse about. I felt the dark red brick buildings behind me, with their

faded signs in black and white, and I heard the street cars going up Main Street with whine and bump.

And then I saw a movement on the foredeck of the *Erie Queen*, and I sat up to watch. The tarpaulin was lifted, and a young man came out after cautiously peering around. He didn't see me, I was in a dark overcoat and I was sitting on the dark cinder embankment of the tracks. He turned up his coat collar and pushed his cap down on his head. Then he walked down the deck to the ratlines which held the ship to her forward piles that stood up black and slightly moving out of the water. He jumped from the deck to the piles, secured his footing, and made another short jump to the shore. Putting his hands in his pockets, he started up the tracks towards me. I sat still. I pretended not to watch. I squinted my eyes and stared off to the bluing horizon. Above the city the night glow began to gain power, and I saw the reflection on low clouds opposite me.

I thought he was going to see me and speak. But he didn't; he went by, and I turned and watched him. At the crossing of the tracks by the corner of the white warehouse, he stopped and waited. For ten minutes he leaned, with his shoulder, against the darkening building. He was tall, and muscular, I judged, and he looked cold but indifferent to the weather. He broke his motionlessness only once, to blow his nose through his fingers. Then he settled back again to wait. Presently he stood erect and stepped forward, to meet a girl that came from behind some red brick buildings. She ran up to him, and he kissed her. He gave her something from his pocket and took her arm. They walked away, disappearing around the red bricks into the darkness. His shoulders swaggered and her little steps were doubled to keep up with him. I felt remote and intimate with them at the same time. When I got so cold that I couldn't stay any more, I arose and walked back to the street car line and rode up to my hotel, marvelling at the simple experience I had shared, and thinking about the raw character of the old excursion boat, and suddenly said that it was as beautiful as anything

I had ever seen the few lights, the black wastes and the rising buildings, with little furies of steam beyond to prove activity from engines

I came back the next day, after debating the wisdom of risking it. I thought, perhaps there was a chemistry about yesterday afternoon that will never occur again. I may be a fool to be discontent with what I have already seen. Perhaps the young man who comes off a deserted excursion boat at dusk has something strange about him, instead of being, as I felt he was, a simple and explicable person.

But I went back, earlier this time, and began to sketch a picture of the boat as an excuse for watching for my friends. And a little after four I saw him again. The day was sunny, unlike yesterday, and when he jumped from the boat to the shore in his two efforts, he saw me and walked by, nodding.

'Hello,' I said

'Hi'

He paused

'How old is she?' I asked, indicating the ship.

'Eighteen years.'

'She looks a million years old,' I said.

'—That old tub,' he said, with contempt.

He stood undecided whether to go on or look at my sketch. I threw it down on the ground and he gave it a glance. He said nothing.

'I can't draw,' I said.

'It's not bad,' he said, with a friendly sound. His voice was neither heavy nor thin, but had a young sound about it. 'I don't see why you want a picture of it'

'I think it's a pretty good way to wait until I get a job,' I said

He laughed

'You won't get any job around here'

'I know it.'

'Hell,' he said, 'who doesn't?'

We watched the sunlight travel on the still water. Then I saw the girl coming toward us, and I began to talk to him

about some of the men I had seen along the front, to keep him there until she joined us. I wanted to see her. She walked with little turns of her feet and ankles on the uneven ground, where cinders and gravel had run down from the tracks and made lumps. She came up back of him, and looked up at his head, and said

'Ed . . '

He turned quickly, and involuntarily waved his hand at me in turning, as if to say, Go away.

Then she looked at me. She was very slight, not at all pretty, but her mouth was appealing and her eyes were serious and much older than her little face and her thin body with its worn purple coat.

'Hello,' I said.

She didn't answer. Ed said to her, 'Did you bring anything?'

She looked at him with fear, and put her hands on his arm. 'I couldn't.'

He shrugged. There was a profound sadness in his attitude, and in his indifference.

'What is it?' I said, because I was by now wholly unable to stay out of their affairs.

He gave me an honest look. His face was brown, but below its colour there was a suggestion of pallor.

'She usually brings my lunch,' he said, with serious pride. 'She gets it from her old woman, and brings it down to the boat. I haven't got any money.'

The girl pulled her frayed collar closer. We stood in silence. I felt a sentimental attachment for them, but with the two of them, I stared at the old white wood of the boat, sharing their embarrassment and their hunger. I shared their hunger, and I proposed that they go with me to have some soup and bread at a lunch cart on lower Main Street. They struggled against my generosity of which they were suspicious; but in half an hour they were sitting with me in a little restaurant eating vegetable soup and oyster crackers. With their bellies warmed and put to work by the food, they

accepted me simply. The girl, her name was Veronica, charmed and shamed me with the exhibitions of her propriety. She anxiously watched Ed to see that his manners were good, she kept her idle hand in her lap, she wiped her lips needlessly with the paper napkin, she prattled, gave gaiety to our party, and quickly won my heart. Her large wise eyes were beautiful when she grew animated, and her voice was husky and musical.

After the soup I ordered some small steaks. The waiter slammed down the mustard pot. Veronica rejected it with elegance and demanded catsup, and then sought my approval, shyly, and I gave it with a smile. She talked. She told me about her family, her father was the captain of the *Erie Queen*, her mother had seven children besides herself. They lived a few blocks from the waterfront. They were Catholics, Veronica had been to a parish school. Now she helped at home in the afternoons, and worked mornings in a cigar stand. Everything she said to me was directed at Ed too, as if, through my feeling, she wanted Ed to understand her, as if she wanted to make him constantly aware of her little life, with its appealing colours.

'Papa says in the spring, when the lake opens up again, we can go over to Canada and stay,' she said.

'I never want to see that tub again,' said Ed.

Veronica winced and grinned at him. Her chin was pointed, and her eyes snapped.

'All right, baby,' she said, 'but that's where we met.'

He nodded.

'We met on the *Erie Queen*,' she told me, 'on a trip across one night last summer. We was both surprised, and after that we went back and forth all the time . . .'

'Do you stay on the boat now?' I asked Ed.

'Her pa says I can live there, if the company don't find it out. Where could I live?'

'I see.'

'Then the old fool sits home all day and gipes because I live on board. I'll get off and stay off one of these days.'

Veronica smiled at him, there was worry in her look. We sat for an hour, chatting, and then she had to go home. We took her to the corner, and she kissed Ed and waved to us. She pulled her purple coat close, and crossed the street, astonishing me with her public adoption of smartness and *chic*, for she walked with style, and her figure was good. Ed watched her gloomily. Then we turned away and strolled back to the harbour. We were silent. Sharing his depression, I was cheered somewhat by the remarkable bombs of light that the street lamps threw upon dingy red brick buildings, and the triangles of black shadow between streets and buildings, and the flat black lines of warehouses, with chuffs of white steam coming up beyond, and fading yellow streaks under the night sky on the lake, against which spars and masts pierced the evening in a wonderfully suggestive calm.

We came to the *Erie Queen*. Ed stood looking at her, smoking. Finally, he said, 'She wants to get married.'

'Well?'

'I can't see it. No money, she thinks I ought to be more elegant, then there's her pa and ma, and that damned boat.'

'She's crazy about you,' I said.

'She's all right. If things was different I'd marry her.'

His sullenness was habitual. It made him handsomer than he actually was, and it was easily pierceable by his real feelings. He was undoubtedly unhappy. But for the remedy, I could propose nothing exact. Work? He looked every day for a job. Marriage? Veronica must use him. Pride? Not without washing away his bitterness. . . .

He nodded good-bye and jumped back to the piles and over to the deck, lifted the black tarpaulin and vanished.

I walked uptown, heavy with wonder. I had an impulse to take a train at once; I felt that here I was getting too closely involved with lives and times of other people. I said, It is not good to study unhappiness when you have nothing to substitute for it. . . . But I decided that I would go back to that beautiful waterfront only once more, and if I saw neither Ed nor his girl I would retire forever from their field,

wishing them well in my heart and banishing them from my mind. It was a foolish resolve, I returned the next day, and Veronica was waiting for me. She was haggard and white, her face had gone old. Ed would hate that aspect I said to myself, and I greeted her with hearty surprise. She was beyond social pretences now, her little fineries of yesterday were gone. She clung to my arm, begging me for news of Ed, for he had vanished, she'd been there all day, alone, waiting for him. Would I go on the boat and look for him? 'He's said a lot lately about clearing out' she whispered. I petted her, touching the bones of her shoulders. And I went on the ship and searched the decks in their twilight of canvas. I called out, there was no answer. A white cat received me on the upper deck with grave disapproval. Everywhere was dirt, the droppings of the winter birds, the freezing of soot, the strange clutter wrought by the winds off the lake. The wood creaked and snapped under my foot-fall in the cold. I peered into the cabins, which were locked, and saw the sheen of spurious mahogany. They had met on board; the moon riding, a few mangy palms in the saloon, a band on the deck, dancing, lanterns, and the lake, silvered and blued for them, everything awaiting the moment in the shadow for their kisses and their mingled breaths.

I went back to shore, and told her. She began to cry.

'But what is it,' I said, 'he will come back.'

She sucked her lips in, and clamped them with her teeth. The tears ran down her chin. She shook her head, and pressed my arms. I couldn't quiet her, I patted her, I clucked, I made scandalous suggestions only to shock her into reason. It was half an hour before she could listen and talk. And then she told me.

There had been a terrible quarrel in her home about Ed. Her parents accused, they threatened, they suspected horrors, they bullied, they wept, they died, for much of the night they had spent the rage and the jealousy they felt. What! Ed and their daughter, both so young and so beautiful, they were in love? That meant only one thing, they



had lain together, what? Wait till the priest hears of this, good God, our own daughter' She hated them to-day, she told me everything, how in the mounting of hysteria, her mother had made her admit that she and Ed had been lovers, and then, by a sinister recital of symptoms, had convinced the girl she was pregnant

'Do you see?' she said to me 'Where is he? I have to marry him, to-day, will you stand up with us?'

My heart sank Ed stubborn, unruly, tender only by after-thought, had shown me how firm he stood against marriage. I thought, the only way will be to tell him she's pregnant. He will marry her then

I said this to Veronica

'No, I wouldn't, that way,' she said, 'I can't force him because of that, my pa and ma would make it terrible if they knew he knew .'

I stared at the water A wind was running, making waves. The *Erie Queen* rocked slowly and icily.

'Can you find him?' she said

Her eyes were swimming in fear I said I would try to find him

'The priest, my ma had me go to him this morning,' she said, with accents of disaster that betrayed how heavy the prestige of Heaven was on her. She said her mother had told everything to their parish priest, who was quick with gloom and predictions.

'Well, I will go up and down here for awhile,' I said, 'and see if I can find him.'

'Will you tell him?' she begged.

'What tell him what?'

'To marry me, but don't say .'

I relinquished her to the cold wait, pitying her unreason and knowing that my cowardice was so great because my weapons were so few I went to the end of the basin, watching for Ed, asking some of my casual acquaintances, but he was not there, none had seen him; perhaps the crossing watchman knew he was there all day, and saw everybody

that passed while he cared for his trains and his black and white gates. .

But no one had seen Ed. I went to the red warehouse, and saw cronies there angrily using tobacco juice. The crew of the *Marylyn Kennedy*, tied up for the winter behind the tug fleets, had not seen him. It was nearly dark when I went back. The buildings were closing upon the water's edge like shadows that share the night. The *Erne Queen*, mysterious with greys and changeful in the light that outlined her upon the evening, was silent. Searching for Ed, I had lost Veronica. I called out for her, and realized that I had been away two hours, walking and thinking, anxious to find him, and yet glad that I couldn't, for the sooner he appeared, the sooner must I have taken him back to that sadness and that hopelessness which awaited us all, where she stood shivering and weeping.

She had gone

'Now,' I said, 'I will never know. I am going home to-night. It is dusk, I am alone. Are they together? Let them be together,' I said, for when the sun has gone to the West, taking all certainties with it, what have we to cling to but another soul? With such lyricisms did I take up my thoughts as I said good-bye to the excursion boat. In spring, Veronica's father would superintend the white paint, they will scrape the boiler, gorgeous with rust, they will whip away the tarpaulins; the band will gather, booming and shrilling breathily on the foredeck; two thousand people will come to the pier, and pay their thirty cents; the whistle will shake the hearts in those adventurous breasts; the *Erne Queen* will move into the eddies of midstream and set out, contributing smoke to the gay summer sky.

A whisper of wind came along the cold quay and whipped the canvas on the closed decks. It was a cold noise, full of doom. I took my leave, hurrying to the lights of Main Street, and suddenly felt the need of finishing something in this life. I went to the little restaurant where I had given my dinner party, hoping that she had gone there to wait for me

or to meet Ed. But the waiter, with eyes like little pools of spilled milk, whipped his wet napkin and shook his head, putting his hairy arm on the counter and staring at me sightlessly and indifferently.

So, cold, I had some coffee, I sat for half an hour, feeling tired and anxious, when a sound of distress cut the air outside. Five engines were racing down the street, banging the windows with their bells, roaring. Sparks flew from the shining boiler of the steamer. People went to the kerbs, and watched. I paid for my coffee and went out, following the gaze of the crowd. At the water front a fan of smoke and flame opened on the sky. I began to run, knowing and fearing. I ran down the cobbled streets, and the reflections from the icy fire lighted my face and my path all too soon. The *Erne Queen* was burning. In the river where she lay was the fireboat, playing arcs of freezing water through the black air. People stood on piles, car roofs, railroad coaches to watch. The canvas was melting in the red tempest that flew loose over the icy ship. Her high funnels and her masts seemed to rise and fall wildly in the terrible light. The firemen cried out, axes smashed at the piles with furious sound, and the ship suddenly swung into midstream, rocking slowly, turning her bow toward the shore where I stood.

'What is it?' I cried, 'how did this happen?'

I saw a knot of reporters and police near the edge, shielding their faces from the heat and bawling remarks at each other. The flying water from the hoses, the timbers cracking and bursting in heat and cold, the shatter and fall of the mast on the foredeck, set up confusing thunder that was infernal.

'Somebody set it afire,' a man said to me.

The police patrol came up, ringing. Some officers jumped out and went to the quayside. I followed. I knew. Ed was there, held by two huge men. His face was sunken and his eyes were wild. He watched the *Erne Queen*, rotting swiftly in the flames to utter dissolution. The reporters were writing, noting. They flashed his picture with a camera. They talked to him. He began to sob. He shook his head. Spittle

gathered on his mouth and congealed from the cold I could see him from beyond the shoulders of the crowd

'Please,' I said, forcing my way through 'Get out of my way!'

In a few minutes I was confronting him

'Ed!' I said

He looked at me. He shook his head

'All right, there you are,' he said, with terrible bitterness

'What is it tell me!'

He opened his mouth to speak. There was a plea in his eyes But before we could say any more to each other he was dragged to the patrol and thrust in. The black wagon, with a whine from its siren, backed and turned and whirled off up the flame-lighted alley between red brick walls.

Facing me was the ship, growing lighter and lighter, sending gold stars up to the completed evening The warehouses across from me were crimson with flame. Behind them were rows of freight cars, where the fire showed orange. Farther back, staring from the night, were buildings where the fiery force showed as angry white. The flames ate the cabins, they flowed like water into the hull, hissing began at the water's edge along the old ship The impact of the hose streams rocked her waywardly. Glass broke and fell out of ports to the decks with melodious chimes.

Where was Veronica? I must tell her, I thought; where is her father? He will weep over his ship

The crowd gathered closer The spray from the hoses clung to us, freezing on our shoulders It gathered on ropes and ladders, on window-sills, and taken by the wind, it caked the locomotive on the waterside tracks that had pulled a flat car with a load of chemical tanks to use on the shore if falling sparks endangered property there. I turned away I walked through the press of people, listening with angry scorn to their comments, their theories. What could they know about it? Yet my thoughts stopped there. what did I know about it? How little, I said to myself, how little I know; Ed and Veronica, what did they mean to me? That old ship dying of torture in her lifetime element, had it

become a symbol for me? Making a sunset on the harbour, what did it show?

I knew nothing To go away and rest among strange people, I thought, was a change for me. I will go back. It is time, I am getting involved.

In the morning, with the echo of those fires in my head and the firelight on Ed's face showing neither triumph nor understanding, I went to the dining-car as my train neared my own city The morning paper was under my arm

On the front page was a picture of the burning *Erie Queen*. There was Ed's face, and beside him a schoolgirl picture of Veronica, as she must have looked when she left the parochial school with the farewells of her nuns in her ears. And I read everything

Ed came back to the quay at six o'clock happy at having been at work all day. A new job Anything was now possible. He went on board, he found, under the first row of folded deck chairs on the foredeck, where she always left it, the small package containing lunch for him. He smiled with thanks and pleasure and began to eat. The night came down, letting those early lights from across the basin show deep in the water He leaned on the rail, full of plans. No words, no ideas, only (I knew from his sullenness and his strength) only a certainty that the future was safe.

He looked down

The cold water sighed on the hull. Something was there. He looked down again With a breast of emptiness, he saw. It was Veronica, silent with despair on her frozen little face. Well, the minutes of getting help, of bringing her to the shore, of the ambulance, of the fullest knowledge, those minutes must have been wry and terrible She was dead. They took her away, the police came, and the reporters. By the time they arrived, the ship was burning, he was shaking himself loose from her tyrannical hold She had served him needlessly Revenge? What else is there, no matter where you direct it? Ed would never be a man of understanding, but only of action and hazy desires

## *Sunday Morning*

BY DOROTHY MCGLEARY

(From *Story*)

ONCE a week regularly, on a Sunday morning, anywhere from eleven sharp to eleven-ten o'clock, Miss McParland made her appearance at the basement door of Number 3, Horkimer Terrace. She did not ring the bell, a ring would have sounded through the house, she took off one of her woollen gloves and, according to prearrangement, flapped it three times against the door glass. The result was instantaneous. she heard a startled cry, the agitated pattering of feet—and there came Charlotte, pushing a barrel of ashes to one side viciously with her hip while she unlocked the door to her friend.

'Oh, Lizzie!' Charlotte moaned lovingly, 'I'm *that* glad to see you.'

'*Is she gone?*' Miss McParland whispered

'Sure, sure. O K. Come on in.'

Miss McParland had to walk slowly, for the passageway was dark and the floor of it waxed to a painful degree

'And you're late, Lizzie. I almost thought you wasn't coming. And me with a headful to tell you!'

'It's the rheumatism. I've been bad with it all the forenoon.'

'See here—didn't you get that stuff I told you about?'

'Well, not quite yet, no. My, isn't this cheerful! Just see how the sun lights on the plants, yonder. Oh dear, but this is cosy.' She lowered herself into the rocking-chair and untied her net boa. 'I'll take off my coat presently,' she said, 'but Charlotte, would you mind if I just slip off my shoes for a minute? My feet are that swollen up, you wouldn't believe it!'

Charlotte unlaced the shoes herself. 'And your stockings too,' she commanded. 'Off with them. You're going to set with your feet in some good hot soda water, if it's the last thing you do.'

'Oh no, Charlotte, I daren't Supposing somebody—'

'Tsch, tsch, tsch!' said Charlotte. 'Look at those poor feet, will you? *Red* with the swelling. What kind of shoes are these you put on your feet, anyway? Just look at those thin soles! What are they—paper? Looky here, you do like I told you and go down town to Osbert's and let them fit you to a pair of them comfort shoes, you know, like old Mrs. Stitch has I tell you it's no wonder you've got the rheumatism, with such shoes as you wear What do you care for fancy shoes? You old woman, you!'

Lizzie's sad white face opened into a giggle. 'Old woman yourself,' she said, making as if to give her friend a cuff on the head.

'You start that, and I'll tuckle the sole of your foot,' said Charlotte

'Now don't get me started a-laughing,' Lizzie pleaded. 'That way I always end up in a good cry'

'Puh!' said Charlotte She laid down a newspaper, brought a small basin and emptied a handful of soda into it She poured boiling water over it, then added cold, testing it with her elbow 'Now then, in with them'

Miss McParland heavily lifted in each foot 'Oh, souls above, what comfort!' She leaned back and closed her eyes.

'Let me know when it gets cool, I've got lots of hot here.'

'You've got it wonderfully cosy here,' murmured Lizzie. 'You ought to be thankful, Charlotte, for this cosy place.'

'Yes, it's nice enough—when She's out,' said Charlotte, wrinkling up her forehead to indicate the rest of the house 'When She's out, then I can make myself feel like this is my own little home This is *my* kitchen, *my* fine gas range and all to do with as I please.'

Lizzie nodded sadly 'Yes, I sometimes wonder what would your mother have said, could she have known—her Charlotte in service!'

'Oh, I don't know. Nothing much, I guess Mamma always used to say, "Everyone to his own last" And her own brother was a steward on a boat. That's pretty near the—'

'Who?' cried Lizzie 'Why, Charlotte, never your Uncle Jim!'

'Yes, Uncle Jim Why, where's the disgrace in that?'

Lizzie got her handkerchief out of her skirt-pocket and held it thoughtfully against her cheek 'Mercy, no disgrace, Charlotte'

'Well, then'

'I was just surprised, that's all Because I remember your Uncle Jim so well, that time he came to visit you folks, and we had our autograph albums out, and your Uncle Jim wrote in them He wrote in mine, "Of all fine arts the finest is that of painting the cheeks with health."' Lizzie looked dreamily at the plants on the window-sill 'As a girl, you know, Charl, I always had such pink cheeks'

'Yes, I mind'

'But now—' She shook her head 'And I can't bring myself to put anything on my face The way some women paint themselves up, I declare I wonder they can look at themselves in a glass!'

'*Upstairs*, is one,' said Charlotte

'She does, does she?'

'*Does she!*' Charlotte opened the oven-door and looked at her pies 'A pity you don't eat pumpkin pie, Lizzie!'

'Oh,' Lizzie gasped, 'my favourite!'

'I'm makin' a cute little one extra,' Charlotte whispered, 'to take home with you'

'But indeed you oughtn't—' Lizzie's hands hugged each other agitatedly. 'Supposing she ever found out?'

'Say, listen! What's that?' Both held their breath and looked toward the ceiling A truck rumbled by, just outside the window. 'Good, that's all it was,' said Charlotte. 'But a truck on the Sabbath, that's not allowed' She ran to the window and looked fiercely after the truck 'No sir, that's not allowed, and if I could catch them I'd tell them so to their face!' She shook her fist 'But still and all, I'm glad that's all it was. I thought sure it was Him up, prowling around wanting his breakfast.'



'But I thought he went to church with her?'

'No, not now he don't. She don't go to church any more—wait till I tell you. She goes to *The Temple of the Master*, if you please. Here, I'm goin' to pour you in a little more hot. Move your feet to one side—'

'Oo-oo, but that feels good,' Lizzie groaned. 'I'll never be able to get into my tight shoes again to go home.'

'Well, you don't have to go to-day till way after twelve. She's good till nearly one, anyway.' Charlotte squinted towards her alarm clock. 'Yes, she's busy now bowin' down to the ground, and takin' deep breaths with one side of her nose stopped up, and all the rest of it.'

'What?'

'Yes, that's what she does of a Sabbath now, instead of worshipping in the house of the Lord.'

'What does she do, did you say? Take long breaths!'

'Yes, you might well ask, mightn't you? Lizzie McParland, I'd be ashamed to tell you some of the things they do, and them women grown. Get right down on the floor on their *faces*! And every little bit they stop and go through that breathing business—first with one side of their nose, then the other. Then maybe they'll all sit down on the floor with their hands out in front of them—look, like this—like they were sayin', "Please to gimme a piece of dry bread, Mister," and there they sit till the Master says, "Put down the hands, little ones," or something like that. He's got 'em so they do just like he says, like a pack of dogs.'

'Oh, for any's sake!' said Lizzie. 'Why, I can't credit any such thing.'

'Lizzie, I saw it all with my own two good eyes—and right here in this house!'

'No!' breathed Lizzie.

'Last Tuesday afternoon, as sure as I stand here before you. But wait now—' Charlotte went to the oven, looked sharply at the pies and removed them to the table to cool. 'Just hold your horses a minute,' she called over her shoulder. She drew out a heavy roaster and lifted the lid. A delicious, sagey

fragrance came from it. Lizzie watched the roaster, fascinated "It's done a-plenty," said Charlotte. "I saw to that " She stuck a fork into the meat. 'Quick, now, let me get a plate and give you a nice taste of this—it's good if I do say it. Roast pork, and sweets laid right in with it Here, I'll cut you the outside piece, that's what you like the best, isn't it?"

'Oh, my *goodness*—' Faint pink spots of anticipation appeared in Lizzie's cheeks, her chin trembled.

'Stay right there and don't you move your feet. I'll put it on your lap ' She spread a fine big monogrammed napkin over Lizzie's lap before she set down the plate 'Take a nip of the apple sauce first off, will you? Tell me is it sweet enough '

Lizzie took up her fork daintily, her little finger out-curved. She tasted. 'Such apple-sauce!' she moaned 'Just delicious. It's just like your dear mother's, Charlotte My, but this apple-sauce does carry me right straight back to my girlhood! Charlotte—I was thinking last night as I lay in bed, why do we have to get old? It was so nice, the other way!' She sighed, and ate a bite of pork.

Charlotte slammed the oven-door. 'Well, as I was telling you, last Tuesday She said to me, "I'm having guests in for tea, Charlotte, so see to it everything's just right. Please to make some of those little cakes," etc and so on Well, here it was a-Tuesday, and me up to the elbows in ironing But I had to stop that, double quick, and beat up some cup cakes and lady-fingers and cook a chicken for sandwiches and what not—not to speak of icing for the cakes, and all—'

'Oh, it all sounds just delicious, Charlotte!'

'If I'd of known then what I know *now*—'

'Oh, *what*?' Lizzie laid down her fork, to listen

'Well, that's what I'm tellin' you. So it come afternoon, and ladies begun to come I let in two or three of 'em; one of 'em had a puppy-dog baby with her And then She said she'd open the door for the rest—and you're welcome to the job, thinks I. And I could hear her up there at the door, gushin' and takin' on. "Oh yaws, m'dear, just *ourselves*,

to-day—no outsiders, m'dear," and they'd chirp back at her, "Oh, how *clevah!*" "Oh, how too nice, m'dear!" And all tha hifalutin stuff, till I thought I'd drop with disgust!"

Lizzie shook her head sadly from side to side. 'Just to think that here you are, bound hand and foot to such people!'

'Bound to them?' cried Charlotte. 'Why, I'm no such thing. Why, I wonder you can say such a thing, Lizzie!'

'Oh, I didn't mean anything—'

'They pay me to work for them, yes. And I work for them,' said Charlotte hotly, 'and that's all the "bound" there is to it!'

'All I was thinking was, how you used to be when we were girls, how a body couldn't say boo to you, in those days. Independent you were, to the word go!'

'Yes, and still am,' said Charlotte with fire. 'Why, I'm even worse that way than I used to be. You ought to be here some week-day, and listen to me talk to the garbage men and the milkman and the gas inspector, and all those. Let me tell you I don't take sass from anybody born.'

'Indeed and I'm glad to hear you say it,' said Lizzie.

'Puh!' said Charlotte. 'What do I care for Her—or Him? Or any of 'em? Not a snap of my fingers, that's what. Listen to me, Lizzie McParland, I could pick up and walk out of here any minute I pleased, and slam the door too, behind me, and never give it one backward look. Yes, and out of sight would be out of mind!' She looked around the kitchen, scowling vindictively, until her glance fell upon the front windows. 'Oh—but not my *plants*,' she said hastily. 'I could never leave my plants!' She came and stood over them. 'Just look at them, Lizzie, look at the petunia to-day— isn't she a sweet? And my primroses—' She dug caressingly with her forefinger at the dirt around the primroses. 'We must keep it nice and soft for you, mustn't we?' she cooed. 'No pebbles, no nasty old sticks of wood.'

'It's funny,' said Lizzie. 'I never could get anything to grow for me. I remember once I tried candytuft, they say it's so easy—'

'I could never leave my plants and you know it,' exclaimed Charlotte fiercely 'Never, I don't care what happens!'

'Well, then,' said Lizzie, 'why should you, I'm sure?'

'Now for your cup of coffee,' said Charlotte 'And a piece of pie' She patted Lizzie on the arm

'No, now,' said Lizzie. 'If I'm going to take a pie home I put my foot down on eating a piece here. I'm no pig'

'But this is lemon meringue!' said Charlotte 'We had it yesterday I put this aside for you'

'*Lemon meringue*—' murmured Lizzie, feebly

'Well, they all come, as I was tellin' you,' Charlotte continued

'Oh yes!' Lizzie gave a little jump in her chair to show she was still interested.

'And the noise went on up there at a great rate—laughin' and talkin' like they always do, and the dogs a-yapping When all of a sudden—would you believe me?—the noise stopped dead! Stone dead! Now what? thinks I I guess somebody's tellin' a joke, and in a minute they'll all whoop out. But no! Not a whimper out of them It was so quiet I could hear the coffee drippin' in the pot Even the *dogs* was quiet, that's what got me, Lizzie. And it kept up I declare it seemed like to me a good half-hour went by like that! And, thinks I, well, have they all been struck dead? For such things happen, you know.'

'Oh, indeed yes,' said Lizzie 'In olden times, that is.'

'Then, oh! the queerest feeling came over me, Lizzie. It come over me right here, up my arms and around my shoulders, like—a kind of a *creepy* feeling—'

'Tsch, tsch—'

'And I looked around me at all the little cakes and the salad and everything, and I thought now who'll eat you, you poor things? You've been made in vain, thinks I. I took up a marguerite and ate it, I felt that faint And Lizzie, as sure as I'll stand before my Maker, I want to tell you—that cake turned to ashes in my mouth!'

'No!'

'Then I took a sip of coffee—just to strengthen me. And then I went out in the hall and up those stairs *deliberately*, of my own free will and accord. If they're dead, thinks I, I want to know it, and the sooner the better.'

'Oh, *horrors!*' Lizzie covered her face with her hand

'I crept up so's the stairs wouldn't creak, and I crep' into the dining-room at the back there, till I come to the porteer, where I could put an eye to it and see around it into the front parlour *Well!*'

'Oh, Charlotte—what?' pleaded Lizzie 'Oh no, don't tell me!'

'The sight that greeted my eyes, Lizzie, the sight that greeted my eyes! On the *floor* they were, the whole pack of of them. Down on their hunkers with their arms out in front of them and their heads on their hands. Even the great big fat one, that old Mrs Pressefoot, she was down too, sayin' her prayers And ask me was she a sight! With her good black and white dress streaming out around her—Get up, you big zebra, thinks I, get up out of that!'

'Oh, forever!'

'Yes, and in front of 'em here this fella stood, eggun' them on Nothing in this world but a great big Hindoo fortune teller!'

'A *Hindoo!*'

'As sure as I stand before you. He had a cloth wrapped around his head, and all.'

'Ugh, horrible!' said Lizzie with a shudder.

'But Lizzie, still and all, do you know what jumped into my mind when first I clapped eyes on him? I ought to be ashamed to tell you—'

'Tell me, Charl'

Charlotte lowered her eyes 'I declare I must've been out of my mind to think it— But it just flashed into my mind like a bolt of lightning. I knew better, only when I caught sight of him just at the first I didn't notice that rag around his head, all I saw was his little beard and all, and in the state I was in I don't wonder at anything Why, LIZZIE, I

actually thought it was—' Charlotte hesitated. 'I can't say it, Lizzie, and that's all there is to it. But you know well enough who I mean'

'Oh my,' whispered Lizzie, clasping her hands in embarrassment. 'Not—you don't mean the bad man!'

'For pity's sakes, no,' Charlotte cried 'Just the *opposite*, Lizzie.' Her face grew red 'The—well, the Saviour, that's who!'

*'Charlotte Louise Crotty!'*

'Well, I can't help what I think, can I? And oh, the start it gave me! Oh, my poor heart, it didn't beat right for hours I thought has my time come? I thought of you, Lizzie. Where's Lizzie, I wondered Poor Lizzie can't walk as fast as I can—'

'Charl,' said Lizzie, leaning forward confidentially, 'if I were you, I wouldn't spread that around that you thought that.'

'No siree, not a soul but you,' said Charlotte 'And believe me, I found out my mistake quick enough And later on when I passed around the refreshments I gave him a good long look Why, his hands were dirty! And when I passed him the sandwiches he took a chicken one, and didn't he open it right up! "What's this—*flesh*?" says he "Yes," says I, short like that, not even "Yes, sir" And he put it back on the plate. Then all the ladies that'd been eating chicken stopped, and all the chicken sandwiches was left'

'Oh, horrors,' said Lizzie. 'The sinful waste'

'No, He ate 'em for his supper that night when he come home. Him and me, between us. And the dog et three.'

'Three beautiful chicken sandwiches,' moaned Lizzie

'But She hasn't touched a bite of meat since O' fish. And him and her had a terrible fight over it, too. Words flew, I'll tell you. That's how I found out how on Sunday she don't go to her church no more, but she goes to that fella's, and all the ladies goes there. The Temple of the Master is the name of it—how's that for fair? Look here, I picked up this folder off the floor a-Tuesday, and I saved it to let you see, so's

you'd believe me See here!' Charlotte reached under the bread box and brought out a two-page leaflet 'Look at that there—"Temple of the Master"—and then some Hindoo hen scratches And here's a picture of it inside here See, it's just a house That there's no church!'

Lizzie took it and holding it at various distances from her eyes until she was able to decipher it began to read "'Temple of the Master"'! Tsch, tsch, yes, sure enough—what will people think of next! "Services will be conducted every first day of the week—"

'That's how he gets around saying Sunday,' put in Charlotte, 'see that? He don't believe in our Sunday.'

'Then something here in gibberish I can't read this '

'But read inside, will you? That's the *worst!*'

Lizzie opened and focussed on the centre sheet. '*Poetry?*' she asked, aghast.

'No, it ain't. It's just written that way Read it.'

' "*Living is not for long, Beloved—*" '

'*Beloved!*' snorted Charlotte.

' "*Like the wind we hover and pass,  
Like the grass we drink the dew and wax green  
before the evening.  
We live like the olive tree—  
At dawn we hold the sky in our branches,  
At sunset feel we the cool quirk edge of the steel*" '

'Puh, I say,' commented Charlotte.

' "*In thy day of life, Beloved,  
Perfect thyself!  
Be swift and strong, wax green, and raise thy  
branches flowering to the sky*" '

Lizzie put her handkerchief to her eyes. 'It's awfully sad, isn't it?' she murmured.

'That's because you read it so sad,' said Charlotte 'I never heard you read anything that you didn't read it sad'

'Down here in the corner—what's this?' said Lizzie. "'Be Thyself, saith the Master, for that is my Commandment, Be Thyself.'" Oh Charlotte,' Lizzie pressed the folder against her heart, 'listen to this—"Live and Love, saith the Master, for Love is the Fulfilment of Life!" Oh Charlotte!' Lizzie let the folder slip through her fingers in her dismay 'Charlotte, I haven't been myself—that's it'

'How do you mean?' asked Charlotte sharply

'No, I can see I haven't. When I think back over what I used to be, as a girl—'

'Oh, *that*,' said Charlotte, bringing out a big pan of peas and starting to shell them.

'Here, move over close, so I can shell too,' said Lizzie 'No, that was the real Lizzie,' she added, 'me as a young girl The real Elizabeth, I should say. I wish you hadn't always called me Lizzie'

'Everybody called you Lizzie—even your own mother'

'Yes, and I think that's why I've got the way I have—old and slow moving, and with my rheumatism and all, I wish to goodness I'd put my foot down on *Lizzie* when I was a girl. Do you mind what your Uncle Jim said, that time he came? You said, "Uncle, this is Lizzie" And he came and took one of my hands in each of his—oh, it was so sweet, too, the way he did it—and he looked at me. "So this is little Elizabeth," says he. "Never let them call you Lizzie," says he. "A beautiful girl deserves a beautiful name!"'

'That sounds like Uncle Jim all right,' said Charlotte. 'These are good full peas, aren't they? You must take a little mess of these home with you and steam 'em up for your supper—'

'But at that time I kind of liked being called Lizzie. It sounded *lively*, full of fun—and how I did enjoy myself as a girl! We had a happy girlhood, Charl, didn't we?'

'Yes, we did that' Charlotte looked off into the distance. 'Never a care crossed our thoughts'



'Now tell me—why couldn't we stay that way? Why do we have to get old?'

'It's the way of the world, is the only reason I know of.' Charlotte gave a heavy sigh.

'Charl, you know that place in the Bible where it tells about the man with the talent, *you* know, how he hid it in the ground?'

Charlotte nodded.

'Well, I do wish our dear minister wouldn't preach on that text so much. Some Sunday night I'm going to step up to him and say, "Dr. Thode, please, please don't preach to us about the talents any more," because it always goes through me just like a knife—'

'It does? Why?' asked Charlotte.

'Oh, just to think how I let all that I was as a girl go to waste so!' Lizzie looked down at her feet in the basin of water. 'My feet especially,' she said. 'And to think how I used to be such a great one for dancing.'

'You sure did,' said Charlotte. 'So did I, for that matter.'

'And then my talent—' Lizzie continued.

'Why—*what* talent?'

'Well, my china painting,' said Lizzie.

'Oh, yes'

'My dear mother spent ten dollars or more on lessons for me'

'Yes, I mind. And you made some awful pretty pieces. That little pin tray you made for Mamma—you said they were wild roses on it—remember? Those pretty little pink things?'

'Oh, *don't* I remember?' Lizzie spoke with emotion. 'All those things I think over time and again as I lie in bed at night. And I can't get to sleep, for wishing—'

'What do you wish for, Lizzie?'

'Wishing I had it all back again—all those times! Or that I had *something*, I don't care what. But something of my own. Yes, that's what I want, something I can call my own!' Her voice broke. 'Charlotte, please to get me a towel, will you? I want to dry my feet and get me right along home.'

'I never heard you talk this way before, Lizzie,' said Charlotte. 'Are you sure you feel real well?' She brought a towel and dried Lizzie's feet tenderly, then rubbed a little dry soda over the soles of them. 'Lizzie, I wish you'd listen to me and go down to Osbert's about a pair of shoes. Why, you'd never know you had feet. Just look at old Mrs. Stitch! They're only four-fifty the pair, and a pair'll about last a lifetime.'

'*Only* four-fifty,' murmured Lizzie, bitterly. 'I can't pay those robbers' prices, Charlotte. Don't keep at me about my shoes!'

'I won't, dear.' Charlotte put on Lizzie's stockings and tied her shoes. Then, self-consciously, she put her hand over Lizzie's and gave it a little squeeze. 'Poor little Lizzie,' she said.

'Oh Charl,' cried Lizzie, in a choking voice, 'sometimes I feel so *alone*—I can't tell you!'

'Well, we're all that,' said Charlotte. 'I'm alone, goodness knows.'

'Yes, but Charl, you *had* your life, that's what makes the difference,' said Lizzie passionately. 'You *had* your husband, and your little son. Even though they've passed away, you've *had* them.'

'Oh, but my heart aches to see my little boy again,' said Charlotte. 'There's a child up the street a ways, looks a little like my Tommy. I could stand there at the window and watch after him by the hour!'

'Poor little Tommy,' said Lizzie, 'yes indeed, just to think of it!' She got out of the chair and drew her coat around her. 'Oh dear, I'm getting as heavy as lead, and when I let myself think how I used to be—dancing and all, and my cheeks pink—it all seems such a waste, such a sinful waste, Charlotte! Sometimes I wonder, what was I made for, anyhow? Answer me that, Charlotte,' she demanded frantically, 'what was I made for?'

'Now, now, you mustn't talk that way,' said Charlotte, patting her arm.

'Yes, I must too. Because I think it so much. All night long I lay awake thinking it, and if I don't say it out I'll burst of it. No, I've lived in vain, Charlotte, and that's the truth of it. Why, it's like one of those pretty pink roses that they take and put away in the Bible to press. They take a flower when it's fresh, and smells good, and they put it away in the heavy Bible till all the good's pressed out of it. And there it lays—all alone! There's nothing to look forward to. There's just the old times to study over again, that's all. Oh, I'd have liked a little girl, Charl! I can't tell you how often I think of it. How I could have sat and combed her hair, and made pretty little curls for her on my finger; my little Elizabeth, I would have called her. And I could have taught her the china painting—'

'Lizzie, I declare you make me feel bad,' said Charlotte. 'I want you to sit down and drink another cup of coffee before you go. It'll steady you.'

'No, I want to get along home, Charlotte, indeed I do. I want to get to my own room!'

'Well. Wait then, till I wrap up your pie, and some of these peas.' Charlotte went to the far side of the kitchen and got out a piece of wrapping paper and a short end of pencil. With her back to Lizzie she took a bill out of her stocking. This she pinned hastily to the paper, and scrawled below it, 'Listen here, Lizzie, this is for shoes at Osbert's, now *mind*—'

'Charlotte, could I maybe have the loan of this folder till next Sunday?' asked Lizzie. 'I want to read it all over again. I think it's so beautiful and sad.'

'Keep it, if you want it, and welcome,' said Charlotte.

'For *keeps*?' Her eyes ran hungrily over the words. 'Oh, thank you! All this about Life and Love, and all the rest of it, I'll read it over and over again, Charl, that's what I'll do. And then do you know what? Why, then I'll lay me down on my bed and have a good long cry—oh, I do so look forward to it!'

## Episode from Life

BY LOUIS MAMET

(From *New Stories*)

THE EPISODE FROM LIFE programme, ladies and gentlemen Station R A D I, Joe Grady announcing First, the winner of last week's letter. Listen well! It is John J. Matthews of two-o-one, sixth avenue, two-o-one sixth avenue—Brooklyn, New York *Con grat u la tions*, Mr. Matthews.

To-night's episode concerns itself with a taxi-cab driver, and a fare he had just discharged at the Grand Central station. The *driver* is speaking

Meter says sixty-five, mister

It's fixed!

It's the regulation meter, mister!

It's highway robbery jus' the same! An' I don't intend to pay it!

Yes, you will, buddy!

Yeah, and who'll make me?

The cop on the corner!

The cop on the corner won't do no such thing! I'm a nephew of Judge Whitcomb I'll pay you four bits and no more!

Meter says sixty-five! And that's what I want. I gotto make the money up, buddy.

Four bits!

Nothin' doin'! Say, OFFICER! OFFICER! Come here a minute, will you?

(A REVOLVER SHOT)

(THE SCREAM OF A WOMAN)

Let's *lynch* the drunk!

The drunk did it, officer!

Too bad we ain't got trees in New York!

Gimme the gun, you What's the big idea, anyway?  
You've got it wrong, officer. You should say: 'Tell it to  
the judge'

Don't you worry about it! You *will* tell it to the judge!

No, I won't I'm gonna tell it to Captain Moley.

Oh, no you're not, sonny. Moley ain't heard of our  
precinct

Ain't that too bad?

You betcha life it's too bad

We shift you to a police station Sergeant Minzer is at the  
desk. He speaks

Why in blazes did you do it anyway, Whitcomb?

The ride wasn' worth more'n four bits. I wanna speak to  
my aunt, Jane Whitcomb, the judge's wife.

You're drunk!

Sure I'm drunk! But I wanna speak to Jane Whitcomb,  
my aunt.

I'll call her. What's her number?

I dunno her number. Never know numbers when I'm  
drunk I wanna speak to Jane Whitcomb, my aunt.

(TELEPHONE BELL)

Sergeant Minzer of the 20th precinct speaking . . . .

Oh yes, how are you, doc? . . . Yes, I *would* like to  
know On the way over, you say? That's *bad*  
. . . Thanks a lot, doc . . . Good-bye!

I wanna speak to my aunt, Jane Whitcomb!

I'm going to lock you up, Whitcomb You killed in my  
precinct. I'm not going to let you get away with it.  
I know your record, son. You've killed two men  
when they were defenceless. And personally I'm  
not satisfied about the speakeasy killing either.  
From what I know of you you came in with a dame  
on your arm and wanted to show off by shooting up  
the place in old cowboy style. You killed an inno-

cent man because you're never sober and your aim is never what it should be. Now you killed a taxi-cab driver just because you don't like his meter. LOCK HIM UP!

And now please come with us to the private chambers of Judge Whitcomb. He has just been told that he is wanted on the telephone and that the matter is urgent.

You say it isn't my wife, Murphy?

It's a man's voice, your honour.

Judge Whitcomb speaking.

Sergeant Minzer of the 20th precinct, judge  
What in blazes do you want? I'm sitting on a case

It's about Ron Whitcomb, judge . . .

Speeding?

He killed somebody in cold blood

*The lousy son of a' . . . Spill it, Minzer! . . .*

A taxi-cab driver let him off at the Grand Central.

Meter read sixty-five. He didn't wanna pay over 50.

Driver called a cop. He shot him without giving him a chance.

What am I supposed to do about it?

I called because I wanted to know if you're taking a hand, Judge.

He's my nephew, Minzer.

The driver he killed has a wife and two kids, Judge.

Never mind that! He's my sister's boy. Send him to me!

Judge, that's the fourth killing in cold blood!

Send him to me, or it'll mean a beat in Pelham, Minzer.

If you let him free he'll kill again, Judge. He thinks he's safe no matter what he does!

*Send him to me, Minzer.*

Judge Whitcomb excuses himself from bench duty that day. He waits in his private chambers until Sergeant Minzer arrives with Ronald Whitcomb.

I won't want you for a while, Minzer.  
He's my prisoner, Judge.  
You really ought to worry much more about that beat  
in Pelham! (PAUSE) . . . Sit down, Ron, or you'll  
fall down! Now! Start your hes!  
I never did like taxi-cab drivers, unc!  
Is this the story? The meter read 65 and you wouldn't  
pay more than 50?  
Sure! Now, unc, you see . . .  
Really, Ron, I don't know how your mind works  
Don't you realize that if you were anyone else you'd  
have been behind the bars long ago? You might  
even have been electrocuted  
I wouldn't be, if I had a judge for an uncle.  
If I weren't so worried for your mother, I'd let you get  
your deserts  
I intended to go to the ranch for a few weeks, unc  
I'll stay longer if you want me to, till it blows over.  
If only Montana weren't civilized now! I might have  
hopes that you wouldn't come back!  
Unc!  
Go with Minzer. And keep your lousy mouth shut!  
Thanks, Unc! I always knew you were one swell guy!

And now we return to Sergeant Minzer once more at his  
desk in the 20th precinct. He is being interviewed by reporters.

What's the dope on the taxi driver who was shot, Sarge?  
The guy must have been lost in the crowd.  
A little bird told us you picked up somebody.  
Wrong guy! No gun, no motive for this one!  
Talked to a fellow who was there, Sarge, he says the guy  
was drunk and that he *did* have a gun!  
Not the guy I caught!  
What's the guy's name?  
What's the diff if we're not going to hold him?  
Killing a headline again, Sarge?

No such thing, boys. We're looking for the guy now.  
We'll always hunt him And some day we'll get him.  
But just now . . . we just can't pin a thing on anybody

And we are once more back in the chambers of Judge Whitcomb There are two people in the room, Judge Whitcomb and Sergeant Minzer

The judge is speaking.

What's the report, Minzer?

The widow's got no means of support Insurance is about two grand There isn't going to be much left after the funeral.

Is the woman intelligent looking?

Not bad. Not bad at all, Judge

I've got her a job as a matron here in the court. She needn't be prompt mornings, but she should report some time during the day They won't be hard on her and it's a lifetime job. What do you think of it? Swell for the widow. It's a funny world, ain't it, Judge? Funny?

I mean the woman will be tickled silly. The hackies don't make much, you know that, I guess If he pulls in twenty a week he's good and here the job will pay about thirty . . . .

Thirty-two as a matter of fact . . . .

That's what's funny, Judge She's a young woman. She can marry again Maybe a better guy, with more money . . . anyway she's got a life job, and that's plenty.

How about the newshawks?

Got something to worry them now, a night-club murder. Ron will be in Montana for a year. He has orders not to come back before that

I guess that's best all right, Judge.

Expect a Lieutenant's commission inside a month, Minzer.



Gee, thanks, Judge. I know I wasn't next on the list.  
The chief likes your tact, Minzer.

And that will complete the EPISODE FROM LIFE for this week, ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience. Please write your essay in the form of a letter of not more than one hundred words, and send it to this station care of Joe Grady, your announcer. The topic for discussion is: DID THE JUDGE DO RIGHT? Again! The topic is: DID THE JUDGE DO RIGHT? The winning letter will be announced next week. Our cast for the evening was as follows: Judge Whitcomb, Harold Fallsby . . . Ronald Whitcomb, Jasper Wills . . . Sergeant Minzer, William Maines . . . the taxi-cab driver, Cary Holbrook . . .

And now Joe Grady, announcer for the EPISODE FROM LIFE, bids you 'Good evening' until next week . . .

## *Frozen Stillness*

BY ALFRED MORANG

(From *New Stories*)

THE wind came over a stretch of flat land, whistling through the tops of scrub pines. Far down the road, a thin line of smoke was torn to tatters by wind-lashing. Doctor Wallace shivered. He always dreaded these long rides into the back land: people looking at him, sometimes their eyes empty, hating thickly, yet unable to define those hates.

Les Parker put a blanket over the horse's back. 'Colder than hell is hot,' he said.

The doctor looked at the house. Paint was falling in dull grey scales from its sides. He could see a woman peering at him from the kitchen window. Doctor Wallace walked across the yard. The wind pushed him along. When he reached the steps leading to the kitchen, a woman opened the door. Her hair fell in a mass of tangled fading greyness. Her lower lip drooped, and a thin line of drool fell in a slender silver thread.

'You're late,' she said, 'I called you early. It's noon now.' Then she added, 'I'm Nan, Sam's wife. He's sick. He went out when I told him not to. Nobody ever does what I tell them to.'

Les climbed into the sleigh and huddled down under the robes. His face was a red spot against the robe's blackness.

The kitchen smelled of soap. Everything was spotless. When Nan saw the doctor take his coat off, she said, 'I'll hang it on a nail. No man can dirty up my chairs with horse-smelling clothes. Sam's bad that way.' Her eyes narrowed. 'He's sick. He went out when I told him not to. He's going to die.' Then she went over to the wall telephone and turned the crank. Her voice sputtered into the mouthpiece, telling a woman down the road all about the doctor's coming, reiterating that Sam had gone out against her warning.

In the bedroom Sam lay sprawled on the bed. He still had his clothes on. At times he coughed, and a thick scum kept coming to his lips. Nan hung up the receiver and came into the bedroom; then she said, 'What's ailing Sam, anyway?'

Doctor Wallace felt of Sam's head. 'He's sick, very sick. How long has he been here with his clothes on?'

Nan dropped her hands listlessly on a small table top. 'Since three days ago. I was mad when he went out. It will teach him to go against what I say. When a man's not God-fearing, he deserves to be sick.' Her voice was hard as the wind outside, blowing over the flat land and scrub pine.

Sam gasped for breath. He could not talk above a whisper. His eyes kept looking at Nan with dull hate. Once he tried to raise one hand. Doctor Wallace started to open Sam's shirt. Nan laughed. 'He's the dirtiest man in seven counties. He's a bad one. My father said not to marry him, and I've lived to regret it. If a woman has ever been a martyr, I have.' Outside, the wind came in a gust and drowned her words.

Sam pulled the doctor's face close. The heat of his flesh was like fire. 'He'll tell you lies. He's crazy,' Nan said. The doctor put his ear close to Sam's lips. The words came weakly, between gasps for breath. 'Nan's not human. She made me stay here . . . mocking me, saying I am going to die. She had you come to take the curse off when she knew it was too late.' Then Sam's lips closed. The effort had been too much. His eyes were glazed.

Nan swept the floor. 'People dirty up my floors, even a doctor,' she said. Then she looked at Sam. 'He won't whittle shavings over my floor for a while. He's too sick for that.'

Doctor Wallace nodded. 'Yes, he's too sick for that,' he said. There was nothing any doctor could do for Sam. He was dying.

In a lull in the wind, Nan started humming a tune: 'Showers of Blessings.' The doctor wanted to tell her to keep still. A small clock ticked loudly. The doctor picked

it up. Even the ticking of a clock can sound like hammers on steel to a man with the death fever.

'Put that down,' Nan said, 'I want Sam to see the time he's wasting being sick. If he hadn't gone out when I told him not to, he would have been working to-day. I count the minutes. God gave them to us. I fear my God. Every one up and down the road will tell you so.' Her lips closed tightly. Then she flicked some dust from a table top. 'It does beat the band how dust seeps in, even in winter,' she said.'

'Sam's not going to live,' Doctor Wallace said, 'he's filling up and there's nothing anyone can do. It's too late. If I had come yesterday there might have been a chance.'

Nan went into the kitchen and turned the telephone crank. The bell shattered stillness. 'Sam's going to die. The doctor said so.' There was a pause, then Nan continued, 'That's right, Mary, no one can say I haven't been a good wife. There's not a cleaner house on the road, and Sam never appreciated it either. He just whittled a stick in the evenings. He never went to church.' Nan listened to the squeaking voice from the receiver; then she said, 'I shudder to think of the hereafter for Sam, but it's something to know that I will have a seat with the blessed.'

The doctor looked down at Sam. His chest had almost stopped moving. A thin daylight seeped in at the windows. The little clock raced. The doctor put a sofa pillow over it. Out in the back yard he could see Les huddled under the blankets, his face red against the black fur robe. Sam twisted. His hands opened and closed.

In the next room, Nan's voice droned on. 'Yes, I've tried to save him. I told him not to go out without his sheepskin.' Then her voice became bitter. 'Perhaps it's God's will, dying, going against what I said. I'm a good woman. You can ask everyone up and down the road. They'll all tell you the same thing, how I'm a martyr to that Sam.'

Doctor Wallace walked out into the kitchen. He was going to tell Nan to stop talking, that Sam was dying. Then

they heard Sam's voice, a hoarse croaking, then the death rattle came. Doctor Wallace shuddered.

Nan dropped the receiver and turned. Then she screamed into the mouthpiece, 'Sam's dead. He just passed on.' The receiver fell from her hands, and she stood in the centre of the room, a thin string of drool falling from her lips. Nan wiped it away. From the receiver a thin trickle of words came, nasal and harsh. Then those died away, and there was only the wind blowing across the flat land, sighing through the scrub pine, and the stamping of the horse's hooves on the frozen ground.

## *Mrs. Lancaster-Jones*

BY EDITA MORRIS

(From *New Stories*)

THE little person then came forward, lifting herself at each step in her tiny, round-toed shoes and walking very quickly.

'Mrs Lancaster-Jones,' she said in a small voice, but speaking quite gaily and clearly, like a little girl who has been asked her name at a party

'Your age? Your references?'

A light shudder seemed to pass through her as these words were shot out into the harsh atmosphere of the employment agency, and hung in the air, shouting to her from every corner—*Your age? Your references?*

'May I?' she said, and sat daintily down on the vacant chair, and her soft voice seemed to hush and shoo away the brutal words.

'I give my nursery-governesses five pounds a month,' went on the young woman, 'which I think is not bad these days, but I'd expect you to pay your train fare on your day out.'

'Oh qui-te, qui-te' She shooed that away too 'It's a dear little boy of five I should be looking after?'

'Yes, Johnny's five, though he's a handful for his age—rather a handful' And suddenly the handful seemed to hover in the air between them, with sturdy, kicking legs, a vivid red tongue pulled out behind her back, and a ringing voice for everyone to hear—'Mummy, need I mind what the new one tells me? Need I, Mummy?' The dove-like eyes clouded over, and two determined lines appeared around the mouth, reducing the 'handful' to a mere nothingness

Now the young woman asked her whether she would mind the country, and at that she dimpled and was full of fluttering movements Oh, she loved the country, loved to arrange flowers, loved dogs and furry rabbits Besides she didn't care for Paris, and though she had been there two full years and

had been happy, qui-te, qui-te happy, with her little charges, she had never gotten over her first shock and—well, distaste of this so foreign city. She was really a country woman, and the school where she had taught for years (oh yes, she had her teacher's certificate, acquired soon after the untimely death of Mr. Lancaster-Jones), that school was in the very middle of the English countryside. Those were her references—there in the white envelope—from Melbury Boys' School, signed by Mr. Odd, the head, himself. And talking about her love of the country, even Mr. Odd used to joke about it. 'Give Mrs. Lancaster-Jones a flower to nibble at, and she'll be as happy. . . .' But Johnny's young mother was rising, winding her big red foxes around the slender width of her shoulders. She bent down and collected her bag and gloves, then stood tearing up the pieces of paper with the names of the other applicants.

'You can consider yourself more or less engaged, Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . Of course it will be different from your life at school, or even your last jobs—and by the way, we'll be calling you "Nanny," if that's the same to you. Those fancy names are so confusing for children.'

A fresh-gloved hand descended on the small grey-gloved one, and shook it lightly and was gone.

In the room the silence and the bareness now seemed intolerable to the little lady: a fly's buzz on the dusty table, a patch of sun on the covered typewriter, and from everywhere wicked words booming at her—AGE—REFERENCES—FANCY NAMES. She shivered, shivered and buttoned up her coat; feeling her eyes fill and overflow, she fumbled for the door.

And it was all much more delightful than she had dared hope. Flowers flooded the whole garden, from which she was allowed to pick to her heart's content. In the morning—well, call it morning—the clock would have turned eleven when Johnny's mother came past the wing which served as nursery, and Mrs. Lancaster-Jones, standing prettily in the

doorway, her grey hair curling and a little piece of lace managing to creep up above the starch of her apron, would call out.

'Good morning, Mrs Radan.' (No, Madam she would not say!) 'Come and look at my baby-flowers'

She skipped from vase to vase, pointing out her various colour schemes. Blue and pink flowers, scattered with those tiny white ones whose name nobody can remember, was her pet arrangement. Mr. Odd used to say, she confided, when a bowl of pink and blue appeared on his dreadfully manly-looking writing desk, 'I know which little bird has been here again' Oh, Mr. Odd had such funny ways of saying things—ways that one grew fond of During her five years there she had had occasions enough to chat with him, seeing that apart from teaching in the lower forms she had filled the role of secretary, and for all his kidding her on her baby-bouquets and her nibbling of flowers, and in spite of his age (he was over sixty when she left), it was all beautifully on the way to ripen—to ripen into something else. But there are bad people in this world—bad, bad, sang Mrs. Lancaster-Jones, raising herself on the toes of her heelless dolls' shoes, and in the small community of a school, tongues seem to be quicker and ears more receptive than in any other place All that evil talk that she, *she*, was trying—oh, even now she was almost unable to speak the word—to catch him, must have reached the ears of kind Mr Odd, who had been affected to such a degree that he had felt the need of a change from that putrid atmosphere and had gone away for a holiday.

Here Providence in the guise of a housemaid or a gardener would come to whisk Mrs. Radan away, and alone in the flower-decked playroom stood Mrs. Lancaster-Jones, her tiny hands knut and her dove-eyes slurred with tears in an impotent rage over those never-dying memories.

After three weeks' holiday he had come back, and when she recalled that homecoming, she gasped with pain and wounded pride. Had ever anyone's return been more eagerly awaited? Every night during those three weeks she



had wandered about her room, unable to settle down, unable to think, shaken and possessed by this willing of him to come back to her. She had willed it, willed it, and to disguise the intensity of her feelings she had forced herself to an appearance of gaiety and lightness, chirruping from morn till night, and one would have thought that flowers simply grew in her footsteps, for never was she to be seen without a huge armful of them—or else just one—a little nestling moss-rose, held preciously in her hand.

The day had come at last. How beautifully arranged it had all seemed that his train should bring him home at tea-time, the hour when a man is tired and wants the ring of a laugh in his ears and the bright colour of a woman's dress before his eyes!

At this stage of her recollections, as a thousand times in the past, she breathed faintly, faintly, as if the scent of that June afternoon still hung in her nostrils, and she took a step forward, her soft eyes dilated, her hand stretched out half-opened, expectantly. . . .

Like that Johnny would come upon her in the middle of the room—in front of his toy cupboard—on a garden path. He would stop, open-mouthed, and then, prompted by some obscure joy of destruction to dim that light of expectant ecstasy in her face, would jump on her or let out a terrific 'Boo!' to make her start and flutter. To his surprise, she never got angry with him on these occasions, seemed on the contrary relieved, as one is pleased to wake up from a dream which is about to turn into a nightmare. She would run after him and catch him, laughing and singing a little tune, like a bird after the danger is passed.

Yet there was ample time for the recollections to come back to dwell with her. After six o'clock the wing was quiet, closing its eyes under drawn blinds, and not before eight could dinner be expected. The endless dark evenings rose up in front of her like blank walls, anticipated and feared throughout the day, embittered by the ripples of young laughter echoing from the big house.

About ten o'clock or later the insolent little under-maid would come to clear away the few pieces of china allowed her for her meals, and march, yes, march out with a '*Bonsoir, M'selle*' which made her tremble with sick anger. Then was the time ripe for the phantoms to rush at her, telling her ever again of that distant evening when the sound of Mr Odd's little car had sent her fluttering into her room, up to the window she had flown, parting the billowy white of the curtains to bathe her face in the clean wind, and her bosom had felt all squeezed and tight with her anguished happiness. They were to come any minute now, the steps summoning her to his study, and she left the window to walk about the room, but had to stop for the burning pain in her breast and take deep breath. She thought how gently she would open the heavy study door, with just that tiny jerk which prevented it from squeaking in the way she had always felt so annoyed poor Mr Odd. They would discuss the recent happenings in school, and he would give her little snatches and pieces of his trip, making her hear the sand crunching under his canvas shoes and causing her face to screw up in pretty horror as he told her of prodding jelly fishes with his stick 'Such a baby,' she would say to him 'Such a baby.' And at that his face would change, and he would come to where she sat in his much too big arm-chair. . .

Her eyes had flown up to the shepherd clock on the mantelpiece, and under the slender wreath in the china shepherd's arms she saw the big hand join the small in an inexorable half-past five. More than half an hour he had been there and she had not been called! Then she had begun a walk across the floor that soon took on the anguish of an animal's pacing of his cage. When six had boomed from the school-house tower she had stopped where she was, right up against the wall, lifting a face that was chilled and hardened, and she had stood there, breathing in those six clear chimes with her nostrils white.

She started up from her reverie with the French church bell ringing out some unimportant hour—eleven or twelve,

she did not care to count, but from the chill and the hush she judged it late and got up to close the absurd foreign shutters for the night.

It would keep, the rest; she knew that she would not be spared. In her narrow bed, with no frills to her pillow and the night creeping and stealing into every corner, she would have to surrender completely, going through down to the minutest detail every shame and anguish, till her body, lashed, lashed, was tearing and bending with sobs.

But even daytime was not so delightful after all; somehow she could not get Johnny's mother to 'catch on.'

'Mrs. Lancaster-Jones, twittering among the teacups, putting out the best little nappies for Johnny's friend to come to tea, felt her heart give a start when that modern young voice pounced down on her in the middle of her busies—'Really now, that boy comes for tea at least five times a week, so why on earth this decking up I cannot see—and the amount of flowers here. . . .' Two ringed hands flew up in the air in an exquisite, mocking gesture of 'dear me!'

And when the smart wooden sandals had clamp-clamped their way down the path, carrying away with them a chill, amused laughter, Mrs. Lancaster-Jones stood, trembling but defiant, saying to the lovely blue nappies that seemed to hover like little beaten animals by their plates, 'You stay where you are, do you hear? You stay where you are.'

Yes, it was always 'nonsense,' or outright laughter, from young Mrs. Radan.

Having the little boys all to herself in the meadow, persuading them to leave off their rough game of Indians, she had taken them prettily one by each hand and was teaching them, oh! so patiently and gaily, some Morris dancing. Three steps back—and then forward you dance! Skipping, flying—it makes you laugh and exult, she had explained to Mrs. Radan. Look, boys, three steps back—now *forward!* But they were awkwardly self-conscious, dragging their steps, their soft little mouths hanging sulking in their faces,

and Mrs Radan was vainly trying to suppress her smiles. 'Oh, let them off now, Nanny. They are dying to get back to their mud pies'

Let them off? When she was bringing light and movement into their lives. And it had been the same with the children she was with before no joy, no spiritual gaiety was she allowed to teach. Four meals a day, walks in the park, bathtime, bedtime, and stupid, heartless games of their own invention.

Later in the summer, when Johnny's granny came to visit, things grew worse. They were almost the same age, Mrs. Lancaster-Jones and she—well-on in the fifties, though that must not become public knowledge. It had been hard enough that day in the agency to form her lips over the 'thirty-eight' which was all she dared admit. the daily living down of more than fifteen years was indeed harder. After those hours of long weeping the small of her back would ache, keeping her wakeful till daylight sieved in through the shutters, and the whole of the next day she would go about, hang about, like a sick cat, longing for a corner of her own, a tiny basket of her own. And she had absurd fears of Johnny waking up before her and running into her room with a dream to find the glass of water with her little false teeth. She would dream of that often, seeing him in his long white nightgown bending over the glass, peering down in it at the small pearly row defenceless at the bottom, and she would wake up in a sweat and tremble.

Before the grandmother's arrival she had had her bun cut off; cut off quickly and easily were those long strands that once had curled and shone around her brush. Little grey whisks lying on the floor, she thought she saw them coil in agony as the broom swished them away, and her shorn head seemed to her lonely and without strength for the coming struggle.

The grandmother had Mrs. Radan's tongue and laughter, only sharpened, and it seemed presently that the atmosphere around Mrs. Lancaster-Jones was growing chilly. Words

like 'that silly old thing' and 'that tiresome pretty-pretty,' scarcely hushed any longer, buzzed and hummed in the air. She could not get Johnny's mother inside the nursery a minute to look at some new and wondrous arrangement, while Johnny too shunned the wing, she thought, and could be heard with his friend, shouting and bellowing in the furthest corner of the garden—quite out of hand.

It had been the same with all those posts that she had had since leaving Melbury: a fair beginning, when it seemed as if her little ways and flowers and dancing would carry the day; sooner or later, however, they would succeed in putting out her light and she would begin to lose ground—slowly at first, but then, her nerve failing her, she would grow panicky and, in spite of herself, would hasten on the inevitable end.

Now it was only her day out that still seemed bearable: the rush in the morning to get everything done in time; the ride in the car to the station, peeping out at the houses and the children, walking so solemnly from school in their funny black aprons; then the train, in which she had a whole hour to herself on the comfortably cushioned seat to go over the purchases she was to make and decide where she would have tea. She planned more carefully than ever now what to bring back for Johnny: nothing of her own choice any longer, no book nor small thing to put down upon his mantelpiece, but some machinery, 'something electric,' anything to keep him content a little longer, a—little—longer.

She was early getting to the station that day, the chauffeur having rushed her there in order to get something more important done. The wind was chill, she thought. Dry but quite chill. She folded the scarf well over her chest, and it seemed to her it tried obligingly to stretch and puff itself up, as though ashamed of its own frailty, being unable to take the place of the fur she so badly needed.

Not a soul had arrived; even the dour-faced, mustachioed old women in their inevitable mourning and market nets,

who took possession of the bench a good half-hour before the train's arrival, had not yet put in an appearance. Only she was delivered like a sack, like a bundle that one stands up in a corner to be blown on by every gust of wind, wet by every shower. No, no, she must not begin like that again or her day out would be spoiled. She had planned a lot for this day, was even going to venture to bring home something for Mrs. Radan—not that there was much that one could buy for a spoiled lady. Only a little thought.

She was happy that the station was not fenced in, so that she could walk right into the country. Standing on the window-ledge her parcel of empty marmalade jars she was returning to the English tea-rooms (oh, she wouldn't be without her breakfast marmalade!), she began to walk beside the railway line, her feet bobbed briskly up and down among the corn stalks.

A thin blast of wind, foul with the odour of beets, made her hunch up in her coat. October! They'd be lighting fires in Melbury now, big crackly ones, and after morning class she'd run shivering into Matron's room, finding her, and perhaps Nurse Evans, chatting beside the hearth. 'Plenty of room here for little Jonesy,' they'd call out, and she would curl up like a ball on the floor between the two huge chairs, stretching her fingers and wriggling her toes towards the fire.

Not her last October at school though, not the October after—after Mr. Odd's engagement.

Only a week after his return had he let the news seep out. Yes, not gaily and loudly announced was it, but dished out in casual little remarks to this one and to that. 'By the way, when the carpenter comes for the gym hall, you might send him to me. There are some changes to be made, as—well, as a matter of fact, I shall be getting married this coming month.' That was how Matron had had it. But she—oh, never would she get over those days of torturing uncertainty, never be able to look them in the face! A week of non-committal small chat between them, her flowers unnoticed, even pushed away to the farthest corner of the table with a

'Honeysuckle gives me such dreadful headaches, Mrs. Lancaster-Jones' at her raised eyebrows. The afternoon when he had finally told her, she had been taking down dictation, the first time since his return and, what with his nearness and their being together in that familiar room, so rattled had she become that she could not get a single sentence right. Whether it was that which had exasperated him to courage she did not know, but he had put down the sheet from which he was reading and begun catching imaginary flies by the window, his back to her.

'I've been thinking, Mrs. Lancaster-Jones, that taking into consideration your morning classes and your correcting work, this might be getting too much for you. How about letting you off for a bit? Perhaps in your spare time you could give Matron a hand with the accounts.' His hand had dashed against the pane, but she did not start, sat deathly still, her fingers turned to ice. 'And the girl—h'm—lady I'm marrying would like a little regular work, something to get her into the routine of the school, if you see what I mean.'

Her unseeing eyes fixed on the silver bands of the railway line, she started trembling so violently that she was forced to stop walking, and it seemed to her that the trembling that had seized her that day, when she somehow made her way out of Mr. Odd's study, had been of such a nature as never entirely to leave her any more.

Through a haze she heard the train's whistle, and started running back. She ought not to be running so quickly, she knew, but she could not afford to miss it; at the thought of returning without having had the little excitements she had promised herself, without parcels dangling from her fingers and that friendly hour at the tea-rooms, she simply would not be able to face another week.

But, sitting in the train, she felt quite ill. It was her running, and this wretched cold weather, she told herself. How cold it always was in this country—unhomely and cold—and the draught in the train was unbearable. Funny, it was, that Mrs. Radan never complained of it, but then she was

always so beautifully wrapped up. Oh, she wished she did not feel so faint, so trembly! Squeezing herself into the corner, holding her coat collar against her mouth in an effort to get warm, she decided to take a taxi for her errands so as to be able to catch the early train back home. Only those taxis did mount up so, and besides there was the 'thought' for Johnny's mother and the birthday telegram to her sister that she must not forget.

In the station the shrieking and shouting could only be compared to the noises heard in slaughter-houses, and people seemed to be jostling each other for the fun of it. She picked her way, tiptoeing almost, so as to be able to see between the bobbing hats, and fastened on to an elderly clergyman, following him closely in case any one should speak to her. But his collar was revoltingly dirty—a sickening, greasy brown; she shuddered and broke away. No, she could not go on. Her head was swimming, and people in front of her were hopping in such a funny way, while umbrellas stuck out at her from everywhere and parcels, enormous unshapely parcels, came sailing right into her face.

She clutched hold of something and breathed with relief. She was standing right beside the entrance of the buffet, near the stand for oysters and clams, and she felt that their sharp sea twang revived her. She stood there, gathering all her little strength, looking sternly down at her gloves, ignoring curious glances.

Well, there was no question of the tea-rooms now, even had she not forgotten the marmalade jars in the station window. By this time they were probably stolen: they stole everything in this country, even empty marmalade jars. Gingerly, her head feeling big and light, and taking high, sudden little steps, she made her way into the buffet, finding a table to herself. Yes, she would have tea, she told the waiter. No *brûches*, no *croissants*. Her *non, non* blew them away till they fled for refuge to the fly-stained glass bowl on the counter. Just some *toast beurré* and *confiture*.

Life seemed slowly to come back to her as she sat there in



the limpid warmth with the gay voices scurrying from table to table. She remembered having been told that this was quite the nicest station in Paris, and newly rebuilt. Curious! Just after leaving her first post over here she had also been sitting in a railway restaurant having a meal; she remembered quite distinctly that she had regretted her choice of lamb. (Stupid of her to have ordered it when one knows that lamb abroad is always disappointing!) That was just after leaving. . . . What was she saying though? Leaving. Who was leaving? She was a silly, a little silly, to misinterpret Mrs. Radan's failure to say good-bye that morning.

Oh, why didn't that tea come? Tea always pulled her so wonderfully together—had that one time anyway, her last afternoon in Melbury, when Matron had gone to the trouble of making her a cup. But what was happening to her to-day? Her thoughts kept playing her tricks—as out of control, as out of hand, they were, as children before the school bell rings. Ah, thank goodness, here it was at last. She took long full gulps, scalding herself, drinking two—three cups; she wiped away the perspiration on her temples and her forehead, pretending that she did not have to wipe particularly beneath her eyes—had to wipe again and again for what welled out of them.

The station clock struck the hour. She felt all at once that she could not face those streets—could not get her shopping done. She had better take the next train, and get home as soon as possible. She had had her little change anyway, and now she would have the train ride back; maybe there would be some nice people in her compartment. And Johnny's mechanics? Perhaps she could get him some sweets in the station—a small pink bag of fruit drops. The gift for Mrs. Radan did not matter; she knew now it was all over.

She sat back heavily, as it seemed to her that she had never sat before, and let her thoughts creep gently about, circling around small matters so that they should not touch the big hurt.

She did not know how long she had been sitting thus,

knew only that her breath came freer, that she could put out antennæ for contact with the outer world. She recalled her telegram to her sister, but put the idea from her head; a few lines would do just as well, and she had plenty of time, sitting waiting for her train.

She took out pen and paper from her ample school bag, and holding the pen in the air, tilting her head, she let her eyes circle the room for inspiration.

'Dearest Helen,' she began. 'I am writing to you, sitting in a charming . . .'

## *Resurrection of a Life*

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

(From *Story*)

EVERYTHING begins with inhale and exhale, and never ends, moment after moment, yourself inhaling, and exhaling, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, moving, sleeping, waking, day after day and year after year, until it is now, this moment, the moment of your being, the last moment, which is saddest and most glorious. It is because we remember, and I remember myself having lived among dead moments, now deathless because of my remembrance, among people now dead, having been a part of the flux which is now only a remembrance, of myself and this earth, a street I was crossing and the people I saw walking in the opposite direction, automobiles going away from me. Saxons, Dorts, Maxwells, and the street cars and trains, the horses and wagons, and myself, a small boy, crossing a street, alive somehow, going somewhere.

First he sold newspapers. It was because he wanted to do something, he himself, standing in the city, shouting about what was happening in the world. He used to shout so loud, and he used to need to shout so much, that he would forget he was supposed to be selling papers; he would get the idea that he was only supposed to shout, to make people understand what was going on. He used to go through the city like an alley cat, prowling all over the place, into saloons, upstairs into whore houses, into gambling joints, to see: their faces, the faces of those who were alive with him on the earth, and the expressions of their faces, and their forms, the faces of old whores, and the way they talked, and the smell of all the ugly places, and the drabness of all the old and rotting buildings, all of it, of his time and his life, a part of him. He prowled through the city, seeing and smelling, talking, shouting about the big news, inhaling and exhaling, blood moving to the rhythm of the sea, coming and

going, to the shore of self and back again to selflessness, inhale and newness, exhale and new death, and the boy in the city, walking through it like an alley cat, shouting headlines.

It was all ugly, but his being there was splendid and not an ugliness. His hands would be black with the filth of the city and his face would be black with it, but it was splendid, himself alive and walking, of the events of the earth, from day to day, new headlines every day, new things happening.

In the summer it would be very hot and his body would thirst for the sweet fluids of melons, and he would long for the shade of thick leaves and the coolness of a quiet stream, but always he would be in the city, shouting. It was his place and he was the guy, and he wanted the city to be the way it was, if that was the way. He would figure it out somehow. He used to stare at the rich people sitting at tables in hightone restaurants eating dishes of ice cream, electric fans making breezes for them, and he used to watch them ignoring the city, not going out to it and being of it, and it used to make him mad. Pigs, he used to say, having everything you want, having everything. What do you know of this place? What do you know of me, seeing this place with a clean eye, any of you? And he used to go, in the summer, to the Crystal Bar, and there he would study the fat man who slept in a chair all summer, a mountain of somebody, a man with a face and substance that lived, who slept all day every summer day, dreaming what? This fat man, three hundred pounds? What did he dream, sitting in the saloon, in the corner, not playing poker or pinochle like the other men, only sleeping and sometimes brushing the flies from his fat face? What was there for him to dream, anyway, with a body like that, and what was hidden beneath the fat of that body, what grace or gracelessness? He used to go into the saloon and spit on the floor like the men did and secretly watch the fat man sleeping, trying to figure it out. Him alive, too? he used to ask. That great big sleeping thing alive? Like myself?

In the winter he wouldn't see the fat man. It would be only in the summer. The fat man was like the hot sun, very near everything, of everything, sleeping, flies on his big nose. In the winter it would be cold and there would be much rain. The rain would fall over him and his clothes would be wet, but he would never get out of the rain, and he would go on prowling around in the city, looking for whatever it was that was there and that nobody else was trying to see, and he would go in and out of all the ugly places to see how it was with the faces of the people when it rained, how the rain changed the expressions of their faces. His body would be wet with the rain, but he would go from one place to another, shouting headlines, telling the city about the things that were going on in the world.

I was this boy and he is dead now, but he will be prowling through the city when my body no longer makes a shadow upon the pavement, and if it is not this boy it will be another, myself again, another boy alive on earth, seeking the essential truth of the scene, seeking the static and precise beneath that which is in motion and which is imprecise.

The theatre stood in the city like another universe, and he entered its darkness, seeking there in the falsity of pictures of man in motion the truth of his own city, and of himself, and the truth of all living. He saw their eyes: *While London Sleeps*. He saw the thin emaciated hand of theft twitching toward crime: *Jean Valjean*. In the darkness the false universe unfolded itself before him and he saw the phantoms of man going and coming, making quiet horrifying shadows: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. He saw the endless sea, smashing against rocks, birds flying, the great prairie and herds of horses, New York and greater mobs of men, monstrous trains, rolling ships, men marching to war, and a line of infantry charging another line of infantry: *The Birth of a Nation*. And sitting in the secrecy of the theatre he entered the houses of the rich, saw them, the male and the female, the high ceilings, the huge marble pillars, the fancy furniture, great bathrooms, tables loaded with food, rich people

laughing and eating and drinking, and then secrecy again and a male seeking a female, and himself watching carefully to understand, one pursuing and the other fleeing, and he felt the lust of man mounting in him, desire for the loveliest of them, the universal lady of the firm white shoulders and the thick round thighs, desire for her, he himself, ten years old, in the darkness

He is dead and deathless, staring at the magnification of the kiss, straining at the mad embrace of male and female, walking alone from the theatre, insane with the passion to live. And at school he could not bear them. Their shallowness was too much. Don't try to teach me. That was his attitude. Teach the idiots. Don't try to tell me anything. I am getting it direct, straight from the pit, the ugliness with the loveliness. Two times two is many million people all over the earth, lonely and shivering, groaning one at a time, trying to figure it out. Don't try to teach me. I'll figure it out for myself.

Daniel Boone? he said. Don't tell me. I knew him. Walking through Kentucky. He killed a bear. Lincoln? A big fellow walking alone, looking at things as if he pitied them, a face like the face of man. The whole countryside full of dead men, men he loved, and he himself alive. Don't ask me to memorize his speech. I know all about it, the way he stood, the way the words came from his being.

He used to get up before daybreak and walk to The San Joaquin Baking Company. It was good, the smell of freshly baked bread, and it was good to see the machine wrapping the loaves in wax paper. *Chicken bread*, he used to say, and the important man in the fine suit of clothes used to smile at him. The important man used to say, What kind of chickens you got at your house, kid? And the man would smile nicely so that there would be no insult, and he would never have to tell the man that he himself and his brother and sisters were eating the chicken bread. He would just stand by the bin, not saying anything, not asking for the best loaves, and the important man would understand, and he

would pick out the best of the loaves and drop them into the sack the boy held open. If the man happened to drop a bad loaf into the sack the boy would say nothing, and a moment later the man would pick out the bad loaf and throw it back into the bin. Those chickens, he would say, they might not like that loaf. And the boy would say nothing. He would just smile. It was good bread, not too stale and sometimes very fresh, sometimes still warm, only it was bread that had fallen from the wrapping machine and couldn't be sold to rich people. It was made of the same dough, in the same ovens, only after the loaves fell they were called chicken bread and a whole sack full cost only a quarter. The important man never insulted. Maybe he himself had known hunger once, maybe as a boy he had known how it felt to be hungry for bread. He was very funny, always asking about the chickens. He knew there were no chickens, and he always picked out the best loaves.

Bread to eat, so that he could move through the city and shout. Bread to make him solid, to nourish his anger, to fill his substance with vigour that shouted at the earth. Bread to carry him to death and back again to life, inhaling, exhaling, keeping the inward flame alive. Chicken bread, he used to say, not feeling ashamed. We eat it. Sure, sure. It isn't good enough for the rich. There are many at our house. We eat every bit of it, all the crumbs. We do not mind a little dirt on the crust. We put all of it inside. A sack of chicken bread. We know we're poor. When the wind comes up our house shakes, but we don't tremble. We can eat the bread that isn't good enough for the rich. Throw in the loaves. It is too good for chickens. It is our life. Sure we eat it. We're not ashamed. We're living on the money we earn selling newspapers. The roof of our house leaks and we catch the water in pans, but we are all there, all of us alive, and the floor of our house sags when we walk over it, and it is full of crickets and spiders, but we are in the house, living there. We eat this bread that isn't good enough for the rich, this bread that you call chicken bread.

Walking, this boy vanished, and now it is myself, another, no longer the boy, and the moment is now this moment, of my remembrance. The fig tree he loved of all graceful things it was the most graceful, and in the winter it stood leafless, dancing, sculptural whiteness dancing. In the spring the new leaves appeared on the fig tree and the hard green figs. The sun came closer and closer and the heat increased, and he climbed the tree, eating the soft fat figs, the flowering of the lovely white woman, his lips kissing.

But always he returned to the city, back again to the place of man, the street, the structure, the door and window, the hall, the roof and floor, back again to the corners of dark secrecy, where they were dribbling out their lives, back again to the movement of mobs, to beds and chairs and stoves, away from the tree, away from the meadow and the brook. The tree was of the other earth, the older and lovelier earth, solid and quiet and of godly grace, of earth and water and sky, and of the time that was before, ancient places, quietly in the sun, Rome and Athens and Cairo, the white fig tree dancing. He talked to the tree, his mouth clenched, pulling himself over its smooth sensuous limbs, to be of you, he said, to be of your time, to be there, in the old world, and to be here as well, to eat your fruit, to feel your strength, to move with you as you dance, myself, alone in the world, with you only, my tree, that in myself which is of thee.

Dead, dead, the tree and the boy, and yet everlastingly alive, the white tree moving slowly in dance, and the boy talking to it in unspoken, unspeakable language: you, loveliness of the earth, the street waits for me, the moment of my time calls me back, and there he was suddenly, running through the streets, shouting that ten thousand hunns had been destroyed. Hunns? he asked. What do you mean, hunns? They are men, aren't they? And he saw the people of the city smiling and talking with pleasure about the good news. He himself appreciated the goodness of the news because it helped him sell his papers, but after the shouting



was over and he was himself again, he used to think of ten thousand men smashed from life to violent death, one man at a time, each man himself as he, the boy, was himself, bleeding, screaming, weeping, remembering life as dying men remember it, wanting it, gasping for breath, to go on inhaling and exhaling, living and dying, but always living somehow, stunned, horrified, ten thousand faces suddenly amazed at the monstrousness of the war, the beastliness of man, who could be so godly.

There were no words with which to articulate his rage. All that he could do was shout: but even now I cannot see the war as historians see it. Succeeding moments have carried the germ of myself to this face and form, the one of this moment, now, my being in this small room, alone, as always, remembering the boy, resurrecting him, and I cannot see the war as historians see it. Those clever fellows study all the facts and they see the war as a large thing, one of the biggest events in the legend of man, something general, involving multitudes. I see it as a large thing too, only I break it into small units of one man at a time, and I see it as a large and monstrous thing for each man involved. I see the war as death in one form or another for men dressed as soldiers, and all the men who survived the war, including myself, I see as men who died with their brothers, dressed as soldiers.

There is no such thing as a soldier. I see death as a private event, the destruction of the universe in the brain and in the senses of one man, and I cannot see any man's death as a contributing factor in the success or failure of a military campaign. The boy had to shout what had happened. Whatever happened, he had to shout it, making the city know. *Ten thousand huns killed, ten thousand*, one at a time, one, two, three, four, inestimably many, ten thousand, alive, and then dead, killed, shot, mangled, ten thousand huns, ten thousand men. I blame the historians for the distortion. I remember the coming of the gas mask to the face of man, the proper grimace of horror for the nightmare we were

performing, artfully expressing the monstrosity of the inward face of man, the most pertinent truth that emerged from the whole affair. To the boy who is dead this war was the international epilepsy in the body and soul of man which brought about the systematic destruction of one man at a time until millions of men were destroyed.

There he is suddenly in the street, running, and it is 1917, shouting the most recent crime of man, extra, extra, ten thousand hunks killed, himself alive, inhaling, exhaling, *ten thousand, ten thousand*, all the ugly buildings solid, all the streets solid, the city unmoved by the crime, *ten thousand*, windows opening, doors opening, and the people of the city smiling about it, good, good, ten thousand, ten thousand of them killed, good, good Johnny, get your gun, and another trainload of boys in uniform going away, torn from home, from the roots of life, their tragic smiling, and the broken hearts, all things in the world broken And the fat man, sleeping in a corner of the Crystal Bar, what of him? Sleeping there, somehow alive in spite of the lewd death in him, but never budging Pig, he said, ten thousand hunks killed, ten thousand men with solid bodies mangled to death. Does it mean nothing to you? Does it not disturb your fat dream? Boys with loves, men with wives and children. What have you, sleeping? They are all dead, all of them dead. Do you think you are alive? Do you dream you are alive? The fly on your nose is more alive than you.

Sunday would come, *O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light, O balm of care and sadness, Most beautiful, most bright*, and he would put on his best shirt and his best trousers, and he would try to comb his hair down, to be neat and clean, meeting God, and he would go to the small church and sit in the shadow of religion in the beginning, the boy David felling the giant Goliath, beautiful Rebecca, mad Saul, Daniel among lions, Jesus talking quietly to the men, and in the boat shouting at them because they feared, angry at them because they had fear, calm yourselves, boys, calm yourselves, let the storm rage, let the boat sink, do you fear

going to God? Ah that was lovely, that love of death was lovely, Jesus loving it calm yourselves, boys, God damn you, calm yourselves, why are you afraid? *Still, still with Thee, when purple morning breaketh, abide, abide, with me, fast falls the eventide*, ah lovely He sat in the basement of the church, among his fellows, singing at the top of his voice. I do not believe, he said I cannot believe. There cannot be a God *Saviour, breathe an evening blessing, sun of my soul, begin, my tongue, some heavenly theme, begin, my tongue, begin, begin* Lovely, lovely, but I cannot believe The poor and the rich, those who deserve life and those who deserve death, and the ugliness everywhere Where is God? Big ships sinking at sea, submarines, men in the water, cannon booming, machine guns, men dying, ten thousand, where? But our singing, *Joy to the world, the Lord is come Let earth receive her King Silent night, holy night What grace, O Lord, my dear Redeemer. Ride on, ride on, in majesty Angels, roll the rock away, death, yield up thy mighty prey*

No, he could not believe. He had seen for himself. It was there, in the city, all the godlessness, the eyes of the whores, the men at cards, the sleeping fat man, and the mad headlines, it was all there, unbelief, ungodliness, everywhere, all the world forgetting How could he believe? But the music, so good and clean, so much of the best in man. *lift up, lift up your voices now. Lo, He comes with clouds descending once for favoured sinners slain Arise, my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears, O for a thousand tongues to sing Like a river glorious, holy Bible, book divine, precious treasure, thou art mine.* And spat, right on the floor of the Crystal Bar. And into Collette's Rooms, over The Rex Drug Store, the men buttoning their clothes, ten thousand huns killed, madam. *Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me, as Thou didst break the loaves, beside the sea.* And spat, on the floor, watching the fat man snoring. Another ship sunk. The Marne. Ypres Russia Poland. Spat. *Art thou weary, art thou languid, art thou sore distressed? Zeppelin over Paris The fat man sleeping Haste, traveller, haste, the night comes on.* Spat. *The storm is gathering in the west. Cannon.*

Hutt! two three, four! Hutt! two three, four, how many men marching, how many? Onward, onward, unchristian soldiers. *I was a wandering sheep.* Spat. *I did not love my home.* Your deal, Jim Spat. *Take me, O my father, take me.* Collette, I adore you, ugly whore. Spat. *This holy bread, this holy wine.* *My God, is any hour so sweet?* Submarine plunging Spat. *Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.* Spat.

He sat in the basement of the little church, deep in the shadow of faith, and of no faith: I cannot believe, it is too monstrous: where is the God of whom they speak, where? *Your harps, ye trembling saints, down from the willows take.* Where? Cannon *Lead, oh lead, lead kindly light, amid the encncing gloom.* Spat *Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.* Airplane: spat: smash. *Gude me, O Thou great Jehovah. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more.* The universal lady of the dark theatre thy lips, beloved, thy shoulders and thighs, thy sea-surgng blood. The tree, black figs in sunlight. Spat *Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.* Spat. *Let the water and the blood, from Thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure* Lady, your arm, your arm: spat. The mountain of flesh sleeping through the summer. Ten thousand huns killed.

Sunday would come, turning him from the outward world to the inward, to the secrecy of the past, endless as the future, back to Jesus, to God; *when the weary, seeking rest, to Thy goodness flee;* back to the earliest quiet: *He leadeth me, O blessed thought.* But he did not believe. He could not believe. Jesus was a remarkable fellow. you couldn't figure him out. He had a sort of pious love of death. An heroic fellow. And as for God. Well, he could not believe.

But the songs he loved and he sang them with all his might: *hold Thou my hand, O blessed nothingness, I walk with Thee. Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigour on. Work, for the night is coming, work, for the day is done.* Spat. Right on the floor of the Crystal Bar. It is Sunday again: O blessed nothingness, we worship thee. Spat. And suddenly the sleeping fat man sneezes. Hallelujah. Amen. Spat. Sleep

on, beloved, sleep, and take thy rest. (Pig, he said.) *Lay down thy head upon thy Saviour's breast.* We love thee well, but Jesus loves thee best. Jesus loves thee. For the Bible tells you so. Amen. The fat man sneezes. He could not believe and he could not disbelieve. Sense? There was none. But glory. There was an abundance of it. Everywhere. Madly everywhere. Those crazy birds vomiting song. Those vast trees, solid and quiet. And clouds. And sun. And night. And day. *It is not death to die,* he sang: *to leave this weary road, to be at home with God.* God? The same. Nothingness. Nowhere. Everywhere. The crazy glory, everywhere: Madam Collette's Rooms, all modern conveniences, including beds. Spat. *I know not, O I know not, what joys await us there.* Where? Heaven? No. Madam Collette's: In the church, the house of God, with such thoughts: the boy singing, remembering the city's lust.

Boom: Sunday morning: and the war still booming: after the singing he would go to the newspaper office and get his SPECIAL SUNDAY EXTRAS and run through the city with them, his hair combed for God, and he would shout the news: amen, *I gave my life for Jesus.* Oh yeah? Ten thousand hunks killed, and I am the guy, inhaling, exhaling, running through the town, I, myself, seeing, hearing, touching, shouting, smelling, singing, wanting, I, the guy, the latest of the whole lot, alive by the grace of God: ten thousand, two times ten million, by the grace of God dead, by His grace smashed, amen, extra, extra: five cents a copy, extra, ten thousand killed.

I was this boy who is now lost and buried in the succeeding forms of myself, and I am now of this last moment, of this small room, and the night hush, time going, time coming, and gone, and gone, and again coming, and myself here, breathing, this last moment, inhale, exhale, the boy dead and alive. All that I have learned is that we breathe, from moment to moment, now, always now, and then we remember, and we see the boy moving through a city that has become lost, among people who have become dead, alive

among dead moments, crossing a street, the scene thus, or standing by the bread bin in the bakery, a sack of chicken bread please so that we can live and shout about it, and it begins nowhere and it ends nowhere, and all that I know is that we are somehow alive, all of us in the light, making shadows, the sun overhead, space all around us, inhaling, exhaling, the face and form of man everywhere, pleasure and pain, sanity and madness, over and over again, war and no war, and peace and no peace, the earth solid and unaware of us, unaware of our cities, our dreams, unaware of this love I have for life, the love that was the boy's, unaware of all things, my going, my coming, the earth everlastingly itself, not of me, everlastingly precise, and the sea sullen with movement like my breathing, waves pounding the shore of myself, coming and going, and all that I know is that I am alive and glad to be, glad to be of this ugliness and this glory, somehow glad that I can remember, somehow remember the boy climbing the fig tree, unpraying but religious with joy, somehow of the earth, of the time of earth, somehow everlastingly of life, nothingness, blessed or unblessed, somehow deathless like myself, timeless, glad, insanely glad to be here, and so it is true, there is no death, somehow there is no death, and can never be.

## *This Town and Salamanca*

BY ALLAN SEAGER

(From *Life and Letters and Story*)

So when he returned, we asked him why he had gone to live there and he said he'd just heard of it and thought it might be a nice place to live in for a while. He had lived in an old house built around a court. The walls were four feet thick and the windows were larger on the inside than they were on the outside, the sills slanted. They kept goat's milk there on the window-sills because the stone made the air cool. You could see the sticks of a hawk's nest hanging over one corner of the roof and Jesus, the landlady's son—he looked up here to see if we thought it was funny a man should be named Jesus, but none of us said anything. We read a great deal—he often whistled to it evenings. Yes, the food was good. They had a sausage with tomatoes in it that was very good and the wine was not like French wine, it was heavier and sweeter. And there were no fireplaces for heating but things they called *braseros*. They were big pans like that—with his arms stretched—and on cold mornings they set it alight and covered the flame with ashes. They would put the *brasero* under a big table. The table had a plush cover to it that hung down to the floor with slits in it. You put your feet through the slits and wrapped the cover around your waist. Then although your feet roasted, you could still see your breath and you couldn't stay in the room long because of the fumes, and sitting by the *brasero* gave you chilblains, but they were a common thing and no one minded. Klug asked him about the women. Were they—you know? The women were all right, he said. The peasant girls were very pretty but they faded early and got fat. Yes, but, Klug said impatiently, but he was talking then about the riots, how they used beer bottles full of black powder for bombs and when they bombed the convent, the nuns all ran out crying and waving their arms after the

explosion and some fell on their knees and prayed in the midst of the rioters, but the bomb had not even chipped the wall, it was four feet thick. All the houses were like that with big thick walls and the streets were narrow and the town was quiet. They could not hang the washing in the courtyards because it was too cool for it to dry so they spread it on rocks beside the river when they finished. It was a very old town and they lived in the same way year after year. Gordon asked him about the spiritual remnants of medievalism. He answered that the people were very pious and went to the cathedral to pray for everything, even lost articles. The cathedrals had small windows and the light inside was yellow, not like the grey light inside the cathedrals in Ile de France.

Well, I thought, as they talked on into the evening, it is not anything like that here. You see, I remember this particular evening very clearly and all that we said because it was the last time John had anything new to tell us, and from that time on, he has lived here with us in this town. We never thought he would settle here. It is a good enough town, but nothing to the places he has seen, not even the kind of place you would close your book to watch if you went through on the train. First there are the ball-bearing factory and the electric bell factory with the other factories hidden behind them; then there are trees hiding the houses with their backs turned toward you and vegetable gardens beside the tracks; and then you would see the spire, not of a cathedral, but of the Methodist church and the town would soon dwindle away into the corn fields and just after that you could look at your watch to see how long before Chicago. It is not like Salamanca, but the four of us were born and grew up here and only John had gone away. And when he came home to see his mother, he would tell us these things that made us seem fools to ourselves for having stayed, but we were busy with our work and could not follow him. There are maple trees on both sides of the streets and in summer it is like driving through a tunnel of green leaves.



You see, he never answered Gordon's intelligent questions and he always disappointed Klug who thinks that all the women in foreign countries wait on street corners after dark winking and motioning yonder with their heads. John was seldom an actor in his own play—he merely looked, it seemed, and told us what he saw. It was the best way, keeping himself out, but they would not admit it so they kept on with the questions. They admitted it to themselves though. Klug said he thought of the peasant girls with their ankles shining under their tucked-up skirts doing the washing by the river bank when he was scrubbing his hands after taking the cancer out of Mrs. Gira, the Polish washwoman, and the nurse was counting the used wet sponges and the hospital smell made his stomach turn. And when the aldermen brought the plans of the new railroad station to Gordon and sat down to talk and object for hours, he saw the smoke drifting from where the bomb exploded and the nuns praying in the confusion and one of the aldermen had spots on his waistcoat that he kept picking at. Though we had nothing but questions when he came, we all knew that the questions were merely little signs to show that we too might very well have been there and seen these things, and that it was nothing more important than chance that we had stayed here. He talked late and I remember there was a bat lurching to and fro under a light down the street.

Mrs. Gira got well though and it is a fine new railroad station.

He was in an old boat-house whistling. We heard him when we came down the path. The boat-house was so old the shingles curled and weeds grew on the roof, and we used to tell him that some day the whole thing would give way with him in it and he would have to swim out with the rafters round his neck. He had borrowed the use of it from Old Man Suggs who hadn't kept a boat in years. When we were kids I remember seeing it when we went to the river-flats to look for dog-tooth violets. It was a motor launch

and he sold it when the tomato cannery started up. Every Summer the river is full of blobs of red tomato pulp and no one wants to go out in a boat then. But John was building a sail boat. It was May then and he had worked all his spare time on it since the August before, every Saturday afternoon, and nights after supper he would go down and work by the light of three oil lamps he got from his mother. That was the Winter we played so much poker and sometimes we would go to the boat-house at midnight and ask John to take a hand. He was always pleasant about it, without any scruples against gambling, but he never stopped working and we would shout above the hammer blows, 'Where do you think you're going in this boat when it's finished? Going to haul tomatoes for the cannery?' He would laugh and say that a good many waters would wet this hull before she was much older. We would laugh because we knew he had got the phrase out of some book, and we would start up the path. The ripples on the water always shone in the lamplight and we could hear his hammer as far as the dirt road where we turned to Klug's house. Often we played till midnight. I won a lot of money that Winter. . .

When we entered the boat-house we could see it was nearly finished. It looked very big and white and seemed not too much to have to put a Winter's work into. He was planing some teak for the deck and when we came near, there was the acrid, leathery odour of the fresh shavings. We had seen pictures of yachts, and once or twice the ore boats on the big lakes, but the things we saw every day, the houses, trees and grain elevators, went straight up from the ground. They had roots. If they had not, as they seemed, been always in one place, they always would be. John's boat was a strange shape, curved for the water. Even in the dim boat-house, propped up with blocks, she seemed ready for movement. I looked at John with the handle of the plane easy in his hand, a carpenter's tool, and we were going to be 'professional men,' and I knew he would go away. The boat had sprung from some matrix within him that we would

never understand, just as he was puzzled when Gordon asked him how long she was and how many tons weight, as if she were a heifer fattened for market. When we went out of the boat-house, Klug said, 'So long, skipper.'

He went away in the boat as I had thought he would and after this he never came back for long at a time. God knows how he got the blocks from under her without any help, but one afternoon he launched her all by himself, and in ten days he had her rigged and the galley full of stores. He sailed away without saying anything to anybody, down our little river into the Ohio and then into Mississippi and out into the Gulf below New Orleans. He was gone all Summer into October. I saw him on the street when he returned. He was tanned almost black. We shook hands and I said:

'Where did you go? Did you have a good trip?'

He looked at me a moment before answering. 'Trip' means a journey you take in a car during your two-weeks vacation in the Summer, maybe to Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon or Niagara. It is a relaxation from your work. I could see as I said it that 'trip' was the wrong word, but just how far wrong, it took me years to find out and then I never was certain. I thought of his boat, a strange and unfamiliar shape, and how he, whom we had seen unsuspectingly every day through his boyhood, had made it.

'Yes, I had a good time.'

'Where did you go?'

'Well, down into the Gulf and around.'

'Cuba?'

'Yes, I put in at Havana,' and then as if he had at last found something he could tell me, 'you know, Klug would like that place—they've got a park there where you can get free beer. It's owned by a brewing company and you can go there and drink all you want free.'

'Where else did you go?'

'Oh, the Tortugas, Haiti, Vera Cruz.'

He showed me a goldpiece he had got off a pawnbroker

in Port-au-Prince He said it was a moidore. He was nineteen then.

When he returned next time, he was less reticent. It was not because he was proud of being a traveller but more, I think, that he saw we really wanted to hear about the distant places he had been. When his boat was coming into the harbour of Singapore, he said you could see the junks waiting with their crinkled sails. And when the ship approached, they sailed right in front of the bow as close as they could. Sometimes they didn't make it, and they all smashed up and drowned. He said they did it to cut off the devils following behind. The day after he told us that, Gordon asked Tom Sing, who runs the chop suey joint, if he believed in devils but Tom only grinned. Gordon said it was the oriental inscrutability. Gordon is quite serious.

During the next ten years John did all the things we said we'd do that time in the apple orchard. He joined the army to fly and left the army after a time and went to Italy. I went to his house from the office the day he got home. He was dressed in white, lunging at himself in a long mirror with a foil in his hand. The French held their foils this way with the thumb so, but the Italians that way. After that he was a sailor on one of the crack clippers that still bring wheat up from Australia, and from Liverpool I had a post-card with a picture of Aintree race-course on the back. It said, 'Give Gordon my congratulations.' Gordon had just been elected mayor and we were very proud of him. How John heard of it we couldn't figure out.

One time there was a card from Aden and another from Helsingfors. You can see he travelled. No one in the town had ever gone so far and people used to stop his mother on the street to ask where he was then, not that they really cared but because the thread that tied them to him as a local boy tied them also to the strange name his mother answered when they asked.

When he was a sailor in the Pacific, spinal meningitis broke out on board. Eighteen people died and they put the bodies down in the hold. The ship's doctor examined all the crew and said John was the healthiest and the captain ordered him to go below and sew up the bodies in shrouds and heave them overboard.

John got a roll of canvas, a reel of pack thread, a leather palm-guard and a needle and went down into the hold. He rigged up an electric light in a wire cage and swung it from a hook over his head. The eighteen lay there in a row. They were quite stiff, and when the ship rolled, sometimes an arm would come up and pause until the ship rolled back. But they were in the shadow and he did not watch them much because the sewing was hard work, about an hour to each one. He jabbed his finger with the needle three or four times and that made it harder. When he got one ready, he would put it over his shoulder and stagger up the companionway to the deck.

High up above him beside the funnel, to escape the risk of infection, stood an Anglican parson, one of the passengers. He had an open prayer book and said the service very quickly, the leaves fluttered in the wind. Then John would pick up the corpse again and heave it over the side. Sometimes a shark ripped the shroud almost as it hit the water; others he could see jerked from the ring of foam of their impact and carried quickly below. There were at least a dozen sharks and John said he knew his work was useless and he took bigger and bigger stitches in the canvas. There was quite a wind and John could never hear the whole service because the wind blew the words away, but a few snatches would come down to him. He and the parson were all alone, the other people having hidden from fear; and they did not speak to each other. When John brought up the last corpse, it had been a Portuguese merchant from Manila on his way to Goa to see his daughter, the wind stopped suddenly and there was a moment of calm. ' . . . to the deep to be turned into corruption . . . ' the parson said. John

picked up the merchant, balanced him on the rail, shoved him over and the sharks came

'And Eloise said it was when she was getting the coffee after dinner Mr and Mrs Booth was setting in the parlour and Mr Booth was drinking brandy like he always does and both of them quiet as mutes at a funeral when all at once the door bell rang and Eloise answered it and there stood John Baldwin My, I think he's handsome Oh, he's much better looking than him And he asked could he see Mr Booth and Eloise said he could, he was right in the parlour. So Mr. Baldwin come in but he wouldn't give Eloise his hat. He kept it and said he was only staying a minute Well, Eloise said she went to the kitchen to get another cup naturally expecting Mr Baldwin would have some coffee and when she come back through the dining-room she was so surprised she nearly dropped it

'She said Mr. Baldwin was standing right in front of Mr Booth and he says, "Dennis, I've come for your wife." Just like that And Mr Booth says, "What do you mean—you've come for my wife?" Eloise said she got behind the window drapes so they wouldn't see her and Mr. Baldwin says, "Frances loves me. I want you to divorce her." Mr. Booth was drunk on all that brandy and he jumped up and began to shout that it was damned cool and a lot of things about throwing Mr. Baldwin out of the house, only Eloise don't think for a minute he could have even if he was sober Why, John Baldwin's over six feet and a sailor and always fighting with them little swords and all, but Mr Booth got white he was so mad and Mrs Booth she didn't say anything. She just sat there and looked at them and Eloise said it was like Mr Baldwin didn't hear a word Mr. Booth said because he was looking at Mr Booth all the time and when Mr. Booth stopped talking Mr. Baldwin looked up at him quick like you do when a clock stops Then he just said, "Well, Dennis," and Mr Booth began to swear something terrible but he didn't try to throw him out, he didn't even come

close to him. Then Mr. Baldwin looked at Mrs Booth and smiled and says, "Come along, Frances," and Mrs. Booth smiled back and they walked right out of the house without her even packing any clothes And that's all there was to it Eloise says Mrs Booth walked right out of her house into a new life, never to return And Mrs Booth they say has gone to Paris to get a divorce from Mr Booth Well, all I say is, it serves him right—he was always running around after them dirty little factory girls Certainly he was Everybody knows it Why, you know that Little Muller girl, the one with the fox fur? Why, Eloise says that—'

I stopped listening then I always liked to look even at the Italian flags on bottles of olive oil. When I was a kid. I had the same feeling then, no one does things like that here, walking into a man's house and taking his wife. If you want a man's wife, you meet her by chance in Chicago and she goes on being his wife afterwards Or maybe it was like the boat We hadn't lived with him He was only the things he had done and those at a distance Now that he had begun his marriage this way I did not think that he would change the pattern, but that was before I knew he intended to settle here.

He was, I thought then, rootless and invincible. He didn't seem to want what we had, what we had remained here and worked for. Which comes down to this, I suppose, and little more: the same trees every day when you go to work, in Summer hanging over the lawns beside the walks, and bare with the snow at the forks of the limbs; and the sound of snow shovels scraping the walks; and when you look up, the line of the roof of the house next door against the sky. You could call it peace. It is just peace with no brilliance. I remember how bright the goldpiece was in his hand.

But he didn't go away again. He settled here very quietly and took a nice little house. He and Frances were very happy, and we all used to say how glad we were that they

were so happy. We used to say it very loudly among ourselves and sometimes to him, and we put ourselves out to help him meet people. He had been away so long that he had forgot or never had known them. We got him into the golf club the first week he was in the bank. Everything we could show him about the town we did gladly.

After he had been married a year, we all came to Gordon's one night to drink beer. Most of the evening we taught John poker, and after that we just sat around and talked. John said

'You know Roy Curtis from out Fruit Ridge way? Well, he came in to-day and wanted to borrow ten thousand dollars to buy another hundred acres. That piece there by the bridge belongs to Dick Sheppard.'

'He'll raise wheat. There's no money in wheat now,' we said.

'That's what I told him, but he wants to have a shot at it just the same. He offered a second mortgage. I don't know though. What do you think?'

We told him that Roy Curtis was a fool if he thought he could make money in wheat at fifty-six cents a bushel.

'He's got a combine, you know. He says he'll have five hundred acres in wheat, and he and his boy can work it all by themselves.'

We remembered when he'd bought the combine. Five hundred acres is too small for a combine. This isn't Dakota.

'You wouldn't lend him the money, then? He's coming in Thursday. It's good security, a second mortgage on his place.'

We told him we wouldn't lend the money, but John had drunk a lot of beer. He kept on talking about it.

'He's a smart farmer, Roy. Look at that house he's got there. It's a fine place, as good as any of these here in town. Got a Packard and a big radio. Why, he said he got Rome on that radio the other night. He didn't make his money doing foolish things. I don't know about the loan.'



Roy's aunt had left him money, but that was while John was away. We didn't tell him. I said:

'Do you fence any now, John?'

He got up laughing and went out into the hall and got a mashie out of Gordon's golf bag and came in with it. He began standing with a bent leg and one hand flung up behind him. He went through the lunges and parries laughing.

'Getting fat,' he said. 'Can't do 'em any more.'

I had to leave early because I had a big job at the office next day. John was still talking about the loan when I left. It had been raining and the wind had blown down leaves from the maples. The evening had been unsatisfactory and I thought about it as I walked along. I was in sight of my house before I thought why, and I stopped to pick off the red leaves stuck to my shoes.

I remember him in white with his face grave. 'You see, the French hold a foil this way. It's not like the Italians. I learned in Marseilles.' That was the way he used to talk. We knew all about loans; we knew all about him now. Of course I could never do more than just remind him of these things because he was so happy. But I did not think he would ever go away again to return and tell us these things, because of his happiness. Suddenly I felt old. It was as if we had trusted him to keep our youth for us and he had let it go. But our youth only.

## *A Boxer: Old*

BY HARRY SYLVESTER

(From *Story*)

### I

COBURN was very weary. His neck hurt from the constant, bent, stilted position he held it in to protect his chin with his shoulder. One eye was half-closed, but did not hurt. Where his jaw hinged was a dull ache, and blood was caked in his nostrils. His arms, too, had begun to pain, partly from blows received, partly from the constant, guarding position. His breath would have been sobbing had he let it. His thighs were no longer springy, moving only with a dull flexibility.

Only his courage was unwearied. It moved in him like a restless, volatile animal, inexorable, surging, insistent for all that Coburn was unconscious of it. It swayed within him with the strong, plant bendings of a great tree in a wind; roared dimly like this same wind sweeping through branches, flowed as icily calm, as inevitably certain as a swift-running brook.

But Coburn was very weary and he knew that Machter knew it. He could tell this from the crooked smile on Machter's face. It was a strange face, the nose shapeless, the lips leaden and hard, the cheek-bones raised. Only the eyes differed from those of the other boxers of Machter's type: feral, yes, but with a depth, an understanding, transcending mere animal cleverness.

This head was on a lower level than Coburn's, it seemed to sway alone, out-thrust as it was from the bent, moving body. It wove as wove the lithe, powerful torso. It came in again. And of its own volition Coburn's wet left glove found it once more, and Coburn's weary legs took him away in stiff, dancing motion.

Still the dark head followed, what might have been a

smile on its crooked lips; still—Coburn could tell through split-vision, the great gift of the athlete—the damp, dark gloves swayed beneath it, weaving, weaving as wove the head and body. They came on, head and hard gloves and feline body, in a rhythm of their own, almost savage in its beat. They came in, and Coburn's balled left glove found the blunted features in a flurry of quick little jabs which seemed intentional, but whose rapidity and number were due to a small frenzy born of near panic. This time, Coburn knew, he had danced back into a corner; knew it instinctively, neither by touch nor sight; Coburn had been a boxer a long time. Automatically his legs moved left to take him side-wise from the angle of rope, but Machter slid to his own right, took the jabs on his creased forehead, and was in. . . . Pain of body, extreme, dull, came to Coburn in two brief, sudden waves; and the gasp wrung from him was half a sob. He slid away, holding Machter's left glove under his arm. Machter's right was poised, the face more grimly smiling than before. He seemed to sense he could hit Coburn . . . and was waiting; perhaps to make sure, perhaps because he liked to wait. . . .

The bell rang. What was probably a laugh came from the crooked lips in two guttural sounds, and Machter turned, walked all the way across the ring to his own corner. Even in this time of pain and weariness, Coburn's feet and body had taken him near his own corner, as instincts a decade old and perfect told him the round was nearly over. By the ringside they said, only, he was still clever.

Coburn sank, without looking, on to the small seat he knew Trant had swung into place in the corner. He closed his eyes, relaxing as his buttocks met the support. He relaxed completely. This he could do very well. He felt Trant ministering to him, felt him hold the elastic of the trunks away from the heaving belly muscles; felt the wet sponge move over face and neck and base of head.

The wind of the towel Vanny swung was good. Trant was talking, jerkily, through the cotton-tipped swabs between

his teeth '... las' roun' ... stay away; stay away from  
thu punk

Coburn knew what Trant was saying, but did not know that this was a remarkable thing. For few boxers hear what their seconds say

Coburn knew he was weary. This time he knew it more than he ever had before. In the past he had known weariness, but it had usually been a thing fleeting, bitter, perhaps, but quickly gone. Now, permeating everything as dampness the air on a day heavy with rain, weariness was in his body. The terrible weariness of the flesh, but, too, the less com-batable, the more insidious, weariness of the mind. Coburn was nearly thirty-three.

Three times he had fought Machter, winning each time, but each time with more difficulty. This time, in the early rounds when his body was strong and swift, he had gained a lead on points which still existed, but paper-thin.

A whistle sounded dully, the seconds-out-of-the-ring signal. Coburn could sense and hear Trant climbing backwards through the ropes as it seemed Trant had been doing always. Then Trant's hands slid, each between an arm of Coburn's and Coburn's body, and Trant's bony wrists rose until they were hard in Coburn's arm-pits. The bell rang and Coburn stayed relaxed. Trant's stiffened arms raised Coburn to a standing position, and Coburn finally allowed life and what vigor remained to become active in thews and body.

The grey-shirted referee, Deady, stood in the centre, Machter already by him, smiling his crooked smile, waiting to touch gloves for the last round. Otherwise, Coburn knew, Machter would have been three-quarters of the way across the ring. . . .

Deady said 'Last round.' They touched gloves, pushing. Coburn could feel the terrific power that still flowed in Machter; even in this brief contact Coburn could feel it. They broke away, but Machter dropped into his swaying crouch.

He wove in, was short with hooked left and right to the body, short as Coburn's rigid left arm sent wet leather probing into his face. Machter licked his crooked lips, and still came on, insistent. Again and again Coburn jabbed, once whipping a long right over, but Machter inclined his head a little, took most of its force on his forehead, hesitated only a little, then came on, steady and unsmiling.

Instinctively Coburn knew he was in a corner; his feet moved, automatically, in the square, sidling movements necessary to get him out . . . but unaccountably, Machter was in front of him, his right swinging up and home to send pain again through Coburn.

At the ringside they said, he's slowing down.

Coburn hung to the other wet body, his lips tight against the rubber mouthpiece, his head bowed over Machter's shoulder, as if in a gesture, to hide, only half-knowingly, his pain from some vague, critical body. . . . A strange pair of lovers, they seemed, to one minded at the moment to note the grotesque.

Light, quick hands were slapping Coburn's gloves down from behind Machter's body. Deady's voice came, impersonal, a little harsh: ' . . . when I tell yuh! Come up!'

Coburn let Deady push him away, then allowed himself to breathe through the mouth a little. The air whistled strangely as it passed the mouthpiece. Things seemed blank, even his pain dull and apart . . . only his left arm leaped into quick, short, pumping action without his willing it . . . Then he was against the ropes, wrestling, wrestling as futilely as must Jacob have wrestled with the angel; wrestling with quick, blocking, holding movements to stem, to pad, the terrific, bitter power of those short, thick arms. . . .

And again Deady was pulling them apart, and Coburn was skipping with halting, almost spastic, almost grimly humorous movements, circling behind Deady, away from the ropes. Machter pawed at his own nose where the lacing of Coburn's glove had roughed it . . . then followed, followed.

The weary, incredible left arm and fist straightened Machter up for another innumerable time, and the right, a little bent now, crashed full and clean against the beard-dark jaw. But Machter just stood, shook it off, smiled a little. Time was when it would have jarred and shaken, perhaps dropped him briefly . . . but the time was long gone. . . .

He came on, head weaving on his body, seemingly like that of some dull beast. But only seeming Machter was not dull. Twice more he took the flurries of lefts, felt a wild, a slightly desperate, right glance off the top of his head . . . was in, swinging, jolting.

Coburn's breath was rasping in his ear, Coburn's body arching backwards, to get away from the punishment flying from the moving leather. Machter could feel the other body turn, move, fairly writhe to escape the ripping fists, and Machter laughed a little, although he didn't know it.

He brought his left to the jaw, not hard, just sort of priming the clever, dodging head for his right; but when he slung the right, the pain-racked face and wet hair went under it, sliding away Machter turned, saw Coburn in the middle of the ring. Machter leaned against the angle of rope, an arrogant play, then started to sway in. But the pale figure did not wait; it came to meet him, jolted his head back with lefts, again threw the long right. Machter did not grow angry. He grinned again. A lot of moxy this guy Coburn had, a lot of moxy, but not much stuff left. . . .

Now he had him against the ropes, and as he threw an overhand right, landing high on the once handsome head, the gong sounded. He laughed and dropped his right glove heavily on Coburn's right shoulder.

'Lot of moxy, keed,' he said Machter couldn't hear what the puffed lips replied. He turned away.

Coburn walked to his corner, head hanging despite his keen knowledge that he should hold it up. The crowd—his crowd, the only one in years to follow a boxer in a day of

fighters—liked him to hold it up. Trant met him with a cool, wet sponge.

Coburn said: 'What do you think?'

Trant said: 'Close,' as he spat the swabs from his lips. 'You got 'im, though—again.' He started to wipe Coburn's body with a dirty towel. He took the dead arms and thrust them through the holes of the robe, pulling the garment tight around Coburn's body. Coburn moved as though without interior volition, on legs held locked and stiff. More than anything else in the world right now, more than desire to hear himself proclaimed winner, he wanted to sit down. But he couldn't. The crowd would have thought it looked funny. . . . You had to stand. . . . Coburn closed his eyes.

'Here it comes,' Trant said.

Coburn opened his eyes, turning to the ring. The announcer had two slips of paper in his hand, and was stooping to get a third from a judge reaching it up from his little coop by the ring. The announcer looked at the slips for a little longer time than usual. It must have been close as hell, Coburn thought. Now he knew, but very dimly, the old, oft-repeated thrill of the moment before the decision was announced; the kick that always came even when you knew you'd won. The announcer looked up from the slips in his hand, took a single long step toward Coburn, and even as the harsh, full-throated chorus of praise started to rise like some gigantic and invisible flock of birds whirring upwards, seized Coburn's right wrist and raised the limp arm high and straight overhead.

The chorus was crescendo now; but interspersed with definite sounds of booing. Through it, as through muffling cloth, came Trant's voice, harsh: 'Well, we got 'im again. How many times we got to lick the punk? . . .'

Coburn did not think of this, although he did not know why; rather, it seemed that he knew why, but kept it away from his active and keen consciousness. He turned a little to walk to Machter's corner for the customary amenities.

But Machter met him half-way across the ring, grinning, the skirt of his robe billowing a little behind him from the briskness with which he moved

Machter, too, laid arms on Coburn in the cold, boxer's embrace. He said 'Close one, huh, keed?' Everyone is a close one. Everyone is closer, huh, keed?'

Coburn had murmured the customary, 'Good fight, lotta guts, kid.' If almost any other fighter but Machter had made Machter's remark, Coburn would have known it to be said for the possible effect. It wasn't that Machter was dumb. It was—well, Coburn didn't know exactly what it was.

He walked back to his corner. The sweat was becoming slightly cold and sticky, and the terrific weight of his weariness eased a very little. Trant and Vanny held the middle rope down, and Coburn climbed through on to the sort of plinth that ran around the outside of the ring. The crowd was still yelling, sporadically now; but as he started down the short, wooden steps, the noise became continuous again, though somewhat duller than before. The booing, too, rose, dimly echoing. Coburn forced, half-consciously, a smile to his lips, feeling the new, dried cracks in them open again as his mouth curved. The faces before him and at angles as he walked up the aisle had open mouths; some of them bright, admiring eyes. They moved and turned. He should dislike them, but didn't. He'd had the feeling often. Strange.

His smile faded as he walked through the entrance under the stands and away from the gaze of the eyes. He could feel the lines of the smile smooth out of his face. He was colder and the weariness, the outer weariness, seemed gone for the moment. Inside him it was different. And not just imagination, he thought. Hell, he knew himself. It was weariness of the inside of his body.

Someone threw open a door and bright yellow light shot upon the concrete runway in a weird oblong. He went into the light, bowing his head against it, closing his eyes. It was warmer here. He slumped on to a slanted rubbing table and let them undress him. . . .



## II

Once more the lights seemed to blare as would the music of a brassy band, beating down with an intensity that seemed to have the tangibility of a weight. Coburn stood in his corner smiling, smiling, brightly, but only with his mouth. The resin rose in invisible waves, making him inhale more deeply.

Gradually a hoarse, yelling chorus rose, growing stronger. Coburn knew it was Machter coming down the aisle. He swung into the ring through the ropes, the skirt of his silk robe rising briefly, stiffly, like the short costume of a ballerina. He half-trotted across the ring, grinning. 'Howdy, keed,' he said, and his hand-clasp through the bandaging was strong and firm; but how much from his sincerity and how much from his natural and spilling exuberance, Coburn did not know. He said: 'Good; how's yourself?'

'Swell, keed, swell.' Machter turned away, laughing a little, half-trotting. The lights did not seem quite so oppressive. The old imagination, Coburn thought. He turned to Trant, who was half-muttering to himself. Coburn tried to be light. He said: 'What's the matter, mug? A guy like you shouldn't put money in the bank. He should spend it. If you put it in the bank, someone'll take it away from you with a first mortgage on the Empire State Building.'

Presently all the lights were dim except the big, bright ones directly over the ring; these threw their white, even illumination on the soiled canvas, shutting the three within their rays from the outside world as surely as though the line of demarcation between light and dusk was a transparent casing of steel.

The loneliest place in the world. Coburn looked across at the swart figure in the purple and blue trunks. Five months had passed since their last meeting. Again Machter had come up, fighting two, three times a month, knocking his men out, technically usually, sometimes clean. Twice Coburn had fought, beating inferior men easily, taking the

first five or six rounds, coasting the rest, finishing tired. Tired, but not weary. Only Machter could make him weary. Coburn was thirty-three

For the first time in his life he hadn't wanted to fight an opponent. This he knew, strangely, while unadmitting it. . . . Why couldn't he get a crack at the champ, anyhow? He'd licked everyone else. So he had reasoned. But they had said he must fight Machter again. Machter had beaten others more decisively than Coburn had. Machter had given him a touch go last time. Two judges had voted draw, one for Coburn. They must fight again, winner to meet the champ.

'But I made the punks pay,' Trant had squealed. 'Thoity-seven an' a half per cent. I made them give it to us.' It had annoyed Coburn at the moment, Trant's exulting over the money. . . . Strange. . . .

Coburn looked at the swart figure in the dark trunks. The features, the outline of the head seemed vague against the tenebrous background, their shapelessness lending an unnatural and sinister air of invincibility to them. Coburn shook his head as though to clear it. Too damn much imagination. He drew a deep breath, expelled it hard, through the nose.

The gong rasped and he slid out, circling to the right of the crouching, weaving figure. It swung vicious left and right for the body, missing by almost a foot with each. The crowd was raucous. Coburn jabbed the flattened nose twice without a return, moved easily away from the looping left swing. He was a little conscious of the yells. 'Give him a boxin' lesson, Billy!' For a moment Coburn forgot himself, went in, snapped lefts easily to the face, whipping his long, swift right over, straight. They yelled. They still went for him, he thought. Then he remembered about saving himself.

At the ringside they said 'Boy, oh boy-howdy, for five roun's they ain't none can hit him with a handful of bird-shot. For five roun's they . . .'

Coburn worked in real close, brought his left up in that rarest of punches, a left uppercut, moved under Machter's vicious hook, and standing a little to the side, visibly shook Machter with a right cross.

'Oh, lovely, lovely,' someone said in the uproar. . . .

Machter was angry and bleeding. He came in, lips in a snarl. Coburn's left moved more rapidly than the eye could count, not an inch of Machter's face escaping the flickering leather. . . . Coburn moved as prize-fighters don't move any more, beautifully, skilfully, cleanly, feet in precise but swift movement, in perfect concatenation with hand and arms as they, too, sped in sure, certain, controlled, if unthought, gesture. Coburn moved as must have moved the negro, Peter Jackson; as must have moved the Non-Pareil.

Machter rushed him clumsily to the ropes, Coburn giving ground easily before the harmless rush. Coburn held Machter's left glove under his right arm-pit, held Machter's right arm at the crook of the elbow with the crotch formed of left thumb and forefinger. They froze still. Like a snake's head, Coburn's left glove went away from Machter's right arm, smacked clean against the dark jaw, then was back, holding. The yelling was of sheer delight.

Machter surged, raging a little; in close, inside his punches, Coburn ran the rough lacing of his right glove across Machter's mouth and nose, Machter cursed. A left landed low on Coburn's thigh. He danced away, laughing, made Machter look foolish with jabs. . . . Near the end of the round, unconsciously he started to sidle a little towards his corner. He turned, still facing Machter, let the other rush, drew blood from Machter's mouth with stinging jabs. Coburn laughed.

Coburn was very weary. One eye half closed, but did not hurt. His arms, where they met his body and flowed into the pectorals and trapezii muscles were so weary as to be near numbness. His neck hurt dully and seemed to have a little crick in it from the crooked, inclined position he held

it in to guard his jaw with shoulder and upper arm. One corner of his mouth was slit a little, and he held it, unconsciously, sucked in. Where the fine muscles of the thigh met, lapping over each other just above the knee, was pain, dull and sheer; and Coburn's legs moved woodenly, almost like those of marionettes', locked. The salt of the blood in his mouth mingled with the taste of the rubber of his mouthpiece and was a little sticky. Breathing seared his lungs a little, and the arches of his feet hurt. He was very weary.

Only his courage was unwearied. It was within him, filling him with that swift and perfect permeability with which light fills a room. It stood in his torn flesh, holding it up. It surged at times with the plangency of surf, sending him against the insistent, pain-giving form before him. Only Coburn's courage was unwearied.

But his body was very weary. And he knew that Machter knew of this. He could tell it from the crooked smile on Machter's face, could tell it from a thing unnamed in Machter, but which in almost anyone else would have been a nonchalance.

The flat-featured, dark face, darker because of the smeared blood, was on a lower level than Coburn's own face. It seemed to sway alone, projecting a little above and beyond the swaying, weaving body. Under the face, Coburn knew, the dark, wet gloves, pain-laden, moved in small motions.

Now the face came in again as it seemed it had been coming for an interminable time. And again Coburn's left glove, the padding largely pushed away from the knuckles by Trant's kneading fingers, flickered into motion, spontaneous, automatic, briefly effective. And Coburn's weary legs took him away, still in dancing, sidling motion, grotesque to one who had seen only the first round or two, and then had come back for this one. . . . But there were none such, and so the change, in the eyes of those who watched, was gradual, not sharply defined . . . and Coburn's leg movements did not look grotesque—only a little pathetic; if any of the watchers knew the meaning of the term.

Still the dark, smeared face followed. Now it took the lefts glancingly on its creased forehead . . . and was in, its beard rough against Coburn's shoulder; the fists finding Coburn's twisting, arching body in hard blows, partly blocked.

Coburn panted, his breath rasping past the rubber of the mouthpiece; he would have sobbed had he let himself. Once Machter's right came free, came high, but the wet, clever head on the aching shoulders went inside the bent arm, and the blow shot harmlessly around the neck. Machter relaxed, dropping his arms, and Coburn knew he had done this to show it was not he who was holding. Coburn felt Deady's light, quick slaps knocking his own curled gloves away from Machter's body; now spreading the bodies apart.

'Break. Come on now, break.'

They were apart near the centre. A voice was sudden clear: 'Give it to him, baby! He's all through! . . .' And Coburn knew that for a long time he had not heard the voices.

The head and gloves and weaving body came on with a wave-like insistence; and again Coburn's wet, balled glove met the face, flickering over the features with the lambency of flame. But the flurry was born in part of an unconscious fear; and the long right followed only automatically. And Coburn danced away with the spastic, puppet motions, danced toward a corner, for it was near the end of the round. Machter came fast, his swinging right driving Coburn against the angle of rope. Coburn gasped, doubling over, yet raising his left arm high for protection rather than dropping it to his body in the more instinctive gesture. He straightened a little. Machter's right was poised for the opening, the face more grimly smiling than ever. He seemed to sense he could put Coburn away whenever he chose; and was waiting, easily; perhaps to make sure, perhaps because he liked to wait. . . . The gong sounded.

The crooked lips opened about a certain laugh; and Machter turned and walked all the way across the ring to his own corner. The seat Trant shoved out barely got under

Coburn's settling body. Coburn lay against the rope corners, relaxing completely. Water was cool on his head, flowing down his face and dribbling off mouth and nose and chin on to his chest. Trant held the elastic of the trunks away from Coburn's belly and rubbed the heaving muscles. Vanny did not swing the towel. He took Coburn's mouth-piece out, washed it rapidly, put it aside. Then he massaged Coburn's thigh muscles.

Coburn opened his eyes. A boy was walking slowly around the inside of the ring, holding high a placard with a number on it. Only one number. There was something wrong. There should be two numbers on the card. It was the last round, the tenth. Sure it was. Something partly panic and partly annoyance came to Coburn. He said, 'Last round?' His voice sounded husky to himself.

'Nah, Billy.' Trant was trying to give his voice an assuring quality. 'Nah, Billy. The nint'. You gotta stay away from him, Billy; stay away, an' when he gets in close ...'

The voice faded. Surely there had been a mistake. He'd never felt so gone at the start of the ninth. At the start of the tenth, yes, but never the ninth. Surely a mistake. The ten-second whistle. Vanny holding the mouth-piece against his lips, waiting for them to open. Trant's bony wrists going under his arms, lifting just after the bell rang.

Still Coburn walked out slowly, more than half-expecting Deady to make them touch gloves for the final round. But Deady was near a corner . . . and Machter half-way across the dirty canvas. He swung a right from the hip and Coburn only partly blocked it. Coburn moved away, back, left extended. For a time he was swift, but a little startled at his lack of accuracy. Then gradual but sure came weariness, creeping through his muscles, seeping into joints. There was the taste of blood.

He saw his own long, brave right flash whitely out, saw the smear on Machter's face darken, grow, fed from a hidden source, perhaps the nose, or the small cut over the eye that

he had opened twice to-night. But still, as inevitable as a wind, the figure came on and on. It made no pretence to defend itself. It took three, five, if necessary, to get one in. But it was rarely necessary.

Things seemed misty. All things but the thing you couldn't see called pain. This and weariness that was like death must be.

He saw the right coming, knew his own left should rise, block—if he were fresher, counter with the same movement. He saw the right coming, raised the left . . . but it seemed something was the matter with his legs . . . and the left didn't get up because something was the matter with his legs. But it must have gotten up in time because it always had. But it mustn't have this time because—well, because something had happened and he was sort of half-lying on the floor, and there was a great, dull noise and pain and dryness of throat. And there was a pounding, definite, regular. And something waving by his face . . . and suddenly Coburn knew it was Deady's arm, counting, keeping time . . . and Coburn knew he had been dropped.

Knocked down. Strange. He had been knocked down before. Ten, twelve or was it fifteen years ago. A long time. He had been knocked down then and had gotten up. He would get up now. He would wait for the nine and get up. He would be smart then and stay away for the rest of the fight, and win. He would be very smart. At nine he would get up and be smart. He wasn't hurt. No pain now. Just kind of tired—weary. The smallest, nearest noise he made out to be—'six—'

He turned over a little, prone, legs sprawled on the floor. His head was bowed, but his bent arms supported his body. He drew up a leg. It was terribly slow. How did your legs get that way? Like wood. Heavy wood. Now he had it up though, foot on the floor. Now the other . . . the other . . . God! Something had happened. He had moved the other foot . . . and then both legs had fallen, straightening out along the floor, and he had fallen and it had all been a little

blank . . . and he would have to get up again because he was lying on the canvas full length. . . .

He licked his lips and they were bitter with resin. Now how the hell had that happened? But he'd get up all right. He hadn't been knocked down much in his life; just two or three times in ten or twelve or fifteen years. But he'd always gotten up . . . and he would now . . . and he'd stay away and be smart and win. Now he'd just gather himself and get up . . . but hell he didn't need any help. Why the hell didn't they keep their hands away? He'd get up. He'd always gotten up. He didn't need any help. Why the hell didn't they stay away, keep their hands away? He could have gotten up without them. Hell, he'd . . .



## *Souvenir of Arizona*

BY BENEDICT THIELEN

(From *Scribner's Magazine*)

THEY had the tank filled and a quart of oil put in the motor and the man was just taking his wallet out of his pocket when the girl said:

'Oh, why don't we get something to eat while we're here? Don't you feel hungry?'

The man frowned and looked back down the road.

'That fellow'll pass us if we do,' he said.

'Oh, well . . .'

'Well, you know what a time I had to pass him.' He turned to the store-keeper standing by the red gasoline pump. 'One of those regular road hogs. Never give you an inch of room if they can help it.'

The store-keeper nodded his head.

'I feel sort of hungry, Harry,' the girl said.

The man sighed and said, 'Oh, come on; let's go on.'

The girl bit her lip and said, 'All right.'

The man leaned toward her suddenly.

'What's the matter, don't you feel good, Gertrude?'

She looked past him at the long red butte on the other side of the road and the heat shimmering above the plain. Her eyes looked tired and even in the late glowing light her face seemed pale.

'Oh, well, all right, come on then,' he said, and opened the door of the car.

'You don't really mind, do you?' she said, looking up at him and smiling for a second.

'Oh, that's all right,' he said. 'Only I hate to have that fellow pass me.'

'Oh, well, you'll pass him again,' she said. 'You . . . you're such a good driver.'

He smiled down at her and patted her on the shoulder.

'My little girl tired?'

She shook her head and smiled again.

He cleared his throat and looked around him as they walked toward the house.

'Great country, all right.' He took out his watch. 'We better not take too long here, though. We've got eighty miles more to go.'

'Couldn't we stay here?' she said. 'This looks like a nice place.'

'Oh, you wouldn't want to stay here,' he said. He called to the man walking ahead of them. 'What are the roads like from here to the Canyon?'

'Pretty fair,' the man said, turning his head partly.

'See?'

He looked down at her.

'Well, I just thought . . . ' she said.

He stopped walking and put his hands on his hips, facing her.

'Now, look here, if you want to run things, why, go ahead; good Lord, I guess I wouldn't mind having a little rest once in a while for a change, driving all day long this way, but if you want me to plan everything and arrange everything and take all the responsibility, why then . . .'

'No, no, that's all right,' she said quickly.

'Well, of course, if you're going to be sore . . .'

He jerked open the door of the lunchroom and they went in.

'I know what I'm going to have,' she said as they sat down at a table. 'I'm going to have a ham sandwich and a glass of milk. What are you going to have, Harry?'

'What? Oh, I don't know. I don't know as I want anything.'

He looked beyond her out of the window.

'You ought to have something,' she said.

'Oh, well, all right.' He sighed and turned to the man behind the counter. 'Make mine the same. Only I'll have some beer instead of milk.'

'We don't have beer.'

'No beer? What's the idea?'

'Indian reservation,' said the storekeeper. 'We can't carry it.'

'Well, well!' He turned to the girl. 'Hear that, Gertrude? They can't sell beer because it's on an Indian reservation?'

'Goodness, is this an Indian reservation?' He nodded his head, looking around him with a pleased expression.

'That's what it is. I told you we were going to see some pretty wild country.'

The man brought over the sandwiches and two glasses of milk.

'How are they?' said Harry. 'A pretty bad lot?'

'Who?' said the man.

'The Indians. What kind of Indians are they out here, anyhow?'

'Navajos.'

'Navajos, eh?' He turned to the girl. 'They're a bad lot, the Navajos. Have much trouble with them?' he asked the man.

'Oh, no. They're all right.'

'You see much of them?'

'Well, I trade with them.'

'Oh, so you trade with them. Hear that, Gertrude? He trades with the Indians. Well, I guess we're in the real West, all right, aren't we?'

He looked around the room and then out the window. The red of the butte across the road was darkening to violet and the sky above it was the colour of deep windy water.

'My, that's pretty,' she said.

He nodded his head.

A car came suddenly past, rolling red dust behind it.

'Damn!' he said. 'There goes that fellow.'

He looked at her for a moment reproachfully.

'Let's go see the things in the store, shall we?' she said, looking toward the door at one side of the lunchroom.

He took out his watch.

'It'll only take a minute,' she said, getting up and brushing the crumbs from her lap and giving him a quick uncertain smile.

In the store there were sombrero hats, cheap tinware, bottles of patent medicine, bright-coloured scarves of brittle silk, piles of soft grey and brown and dull red angular-patterned Navajo rugs, musty-smelling cotton print in long oval bolts, woven baskets and Indian pottery, rows of canned goods, dusty-looking red and green and yellow penny candies and, next to them in a glass case, a pile of silver and turquoise Indian jewellery

The storekeeper opened the top of the case and she began to examine the jewellery Harry looked over her shoulder for a few moments, then turned away and leaned against the counter, looking vaguely around the room.

'D'ja see those ten-gallon hats, Gertrude?' He took a cigarette out of his pocket and laughed. 'Some lids, all right'

She held up a bracelet of beaten silver set with thick round turquoises

'Isn't this a beauty, Harry?'

He looked at the storekeeper who was leaning against the wall behind the counter rolling a cigarette

'Here's where I get nicked,' he said and gave a sigh.

She put the bracelet back.

'Would you like that one, sweetheart?' he said, looking down at her and smiling tolerantly.

'Oh, Harry, I'm afraid it's too expensive,' she said

She looked from him to the storekeeper and then at him again.

'That one's twelve dollars,' said the storekeeper.

'You like that one, sweetheart?' Harry said, putting his hand for a moment on her shoulder. 'Would you like that for a souvenir of the wild and woolly West, would you?'

'Oh, Harry . . .' she said.

'I guess that would prove you'd been in real wild country, all right, wouldn't it?' He turned to the storekeeper. 'Back East in Michigan, where we come from, you don't see stuff like this.'

The storekeeper nodded his head.

'Go ahead,' said Harry 'If you really want it It'll make

a nice souvenir. You can tell all your friends you've been on a real Indian trading post. You . . .'

Just then the door opened and an Indian came in, walking noiselessly in brown soft moccasins. He was tall and his movements as he walked across to the counter were easy and graceful. His long straight black hair was bound by a headband of cerise silk and he wore a shiny black sateen shirt. Around his neck was a string of rough turquoises and on each wrist was a silver bracelet set with turquoises. Under his arm he was carrying a white goat-skin.

'For God's sake . . .' Harry muttered.

He stood staring at him, his mouth slightly open. Gertrude looked down again at the jewellery.

'Look, Gertrude,' he said, leaning toward her. 'Look at his hair, for God's sake!'

She nodded her head and looked up for a second, then turned again to the showcase in front of her, bending down over it.

The Indian tossed the goatskin on the counter and the storekeeper picked it up and said a few words in Navajo.

Harry nudged her and said, 'Look at his shoes.'

She looked up over her shoulder. The Indian turned his head slowly and looked at them without moving for five or six seconds. Then he turned his head slowly away again.

'Look,' said Gertrude. 'This is a nice one too, Harry.'

He nodded his head without looking, watching the Indian. Still watching him, he slowly lighted his cigarette. Then he put his hands in his pockets and strolled across the store to where the Indian and the storekeeper were standing.

She looked up, holding a necklace of rough turquoises in her hand.

'Harry . . .' she began.

He turned his head and winked at her. When he got over to the other side of the store he leaned against the counter, looking down at the goatskin that was lying there and occasionally looking up at the Indian, who did not seem to notice that he was there.

'Oh, Harry . . .' she called.

He turned his head partly toward her and winked again. Then he cleared his throat and said:

'Well, Chief, how's hunting these days? Heap big good?'

The Indian turned his head slowly and looked at him. Then he turned away again. Harry laughed.

She watched them standing there Harry looking up and the Indian looking straight ahead of him, standing perfectly motionless. The light coming from the window behind the counter made highlights on the Indian's dark face and arched strong-looking nose and on Harry's glasses.

Harry turned to the storekeeper with a laugh and said: 'No danger of being scalped or anything, is there?'

The storekeeper shook his head and picked up the goat-skin. He came out from behind the counter and started to walk across the room. The Indian followed him, brushing past Harry, who stood leaning back against the counter, the cigarette hanging from his mouth and a grin on his face. He watched the Indian for a few seconds, then hitched up his trousers and walked back to where Gertrude was standing, bending down over the showcase in which was the silver and turquoise jewellery.

He came close to her and whispered in her ear:

'Did you see the way I kidded old Rain-in-the-Face, just now?'

She nodded her head, looking down at the jewellery.

He turned around and stared at the Indian who was walking toward the door with a piece of cotton print and some red and white labelled cans of soup under his arm. The Indian walked slowly and went out of the door without turning his head.

Harry grinned and said, 'Well, they're a real sociable lot, all right, aren't they?' He turned to the storekeeper. 'You have much trouble with them?'

'No,' said the storekeeper.

'Well,' said Harry, 'how about that little trinket, sweetheart? Did you find what you wanted yet, because it's

getting sort of late.' He took out his watch. 'Good night, half-past six already, we better get going.'

She turned slowly away from the showcase.

'All right,' she said, looking toward the open door.

He reached in his back pocket for his wallet.

'Well, what's the damage?'

'Well,' she said, 'well, I don't guess I want one of those after all.'

'What?' He looked surprised. 'Why not? You think I . . . I begrudge you a little trinket for a souvenir, sweetheart? Why, good night . . .'

'No. No, it isn't that,' she said. 'Only . . .'

'Only what?'

'Well, I mean it's not really necessary. I have a lot of jewellery already. So . . .'

'So what?'

'So . . . well, it really isn't necessary.'

'Now, now,' he said, patting her on the arm. 'That's not the point. If you like it . . . why, then you'll have it. That's all. Besides, it'll make a nice souvenir.'

'I know, but . . .'

He stared down at her.

'Don't you want a souvenir of a real Indian trading post, Gertrude?' He leaned closer to her. 'And of our honeymoon?'

She looked down at the floor and blushed.

He threw back his head and laughed.

'You funny kid!'

'Well, I mean I don't think I really want one,' she said. 'I mean they're really sort of heavy. I don't think they'd look so good on me.'

He looked down at the jewellery lying in the showcase.

'Oh, I see . . . well, maybe you're right at that. Maybe they are sort of heavy. I didn't think of that.'

'Yes, I really think they're sort of heavy.'

He touched her on the arm.

'But for Heaven's sake, sweetheart, don't think I care

about the money I . . I'd like for you to have some little trinket for a souvenir of Arizona '

'No,' she said, shaking her head and looking beyond him out of the door 'No, really I think they're sort of heavy.'

He took out his watch

'Well, I guess we might as well go, then, shall we?'

'Yes,' she said 'Let's go '

He turned to the storekeeper.

'Well, so long It's been a great experience, seeing a real Indian trading post, I mean '

'So long,' said the storekeeper. 'Good-bye, ma'am.'

They drove along going fast over the rough earth road. Thick red dust rolled up behind them and drifted, slowly thinning, across the plain. Above each butte was a flat-bottomed cloud, motionless as a becalmed ship in the deep round sky.

Harry took out his watch and looked at the speedometer

'I guess it'll take about two hours on these roads,' he said.

He glanced over at Gertrude.

'What's the matter, sweetheart?' he said

She looked at him and smiled

'Nothing. Why?'

'I don't know,' he said 'You were so sort of quiet, that's all '

'No, I'm all right I just . . '

'Oh, for God's sake, look!' he said 'Old Rain-in-the-Face, himself.'

The Indian stepped off the road as they went past, looking straight ahead of him. His cerise headband made a brilliant spot against the dull brick-red earth of the plain.

Harry waved his hand at him and shouted something that Gertrude didn't understand.

He shook his head and laughed.

'Well, he's the real thing, all right,' he said. 'But they certainly aren't what you might call sociable, are they?'

She smiled and nodded her head.

For a time they were silent. Then he said:



'But still it's sort of too bad you didn't let me get you some little trinket, just for a souvenir. Just to sort of remember the place by.'

'Oh, I'll remember it,' she said.

'Well, it certainly was an interesting experience, wasn't it?' he said. 'A real Indian trading post, with . . . Say, I'll bet that's that fellow up ahead. See that dust?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Now we'll see who owns the road . . .'

He straightened up in the seat and the car shot ahead as he pressed his foot down on the accelerator.

The darkening buttes streamed by on either side and a star came out in the pale blue of the fading sky.

## *The Sun and The Rain*

BY THOMAS WOLFE

(From *Scribner's Magazine*)

WHEN he awoke he was filled with a numb excitement. It was a grey wintry day with snow in the air, and he expected something to happen. He had this feeling often in the country in France: it was a strange mixed feeling of desolation and homelessness, of wondering with a ghostly emptiness why he was there—and a momentary feeling of joy, and hope, and expectancy, without knowing what it was he was going to find.

In the afternoon he went down to the station and took a train that was going to Orleans. He did not know where Orleans was. The train was a mixed train, made up of goods-cars and passenger compartments. He bought a third-class ticket and got into one of the compartments. Then the shrill little whistle blew, and the train rattled out of Chartres into the countryside, in the abrupt and casual way a little French train has, and that was disquieting to him.

There was a light mask of snow on the fields, and the air was smoky: the whole earth seemed to smoke and steam and from the windows of the train one could see the wet earth and the striped cultivated pattern of the fields, and now and then some farm buildings. It did not look like America: the land looked fat and well kept, and even the smoky wintry woods had this well-kept appearance. Far off sometimes one could see tall lines of poplars and knew that there was water there.

In the compartment he found three people—an old peasant and his wife and his daughter. The old peasant had sprouting moustaches, a seamed and weather-beaten face, and small rheumy-looking eyes. His hands had a rock-like heaviness and solidity, and he kept them clasped upon his knees. His wife's face was smooth and brown, there were fine webs of wrinkles around her eyes, and her face was

like an old brown bowl. The daughter had a dark sullen face and sat away from them next the window as if she were ashamed of them. From time to time when they spoke to her she would answer them in an infuriated kind of voice without looking at them.

The peasant began to speak amiably to him when he entered the compartment. He smiled and grinned back at the man, although he did not understand a word the man was saying, and the peasant kept on talking then, thinking he understood.

The peasant took from his coat a package of the cheap powerful tobacco—the 'bleu—which the French Government provides for a few cents for the poor, and prepared to stuff his pipe. The young man pulled a package of American cigarettes from his pocket and offered them to the peasant.

'Will you have one?'

'My faith, yes!' said the peasant.

He took a cigarette clumsily from the package and held it between his great stiff fingers, then he held it to the flame the young man offered, puffing at it in an unaccustomed way. Then he fell to examining it curiously, revolving it in his hands to read the label. He turned to his wife, who had followed every movement of this simple transaction with the glittering intent eyes of an animal, and began a rapid and excited discussion with her.

'It's American—this.'

'Is it good?'

'My faith, yes—it's of good quality.'

'Here, let me see! What does it call itself?'

They stared dumbly at the label.

'What do you call this?' said the peasant to the young man.

'Lucky Strike,' said the youth, dutifully phonetical.

'L-L-Leck-ee?' they stared doubtfully. 'What does that wish to say in French?'

'Je ne sais pas,' he answered.

'Where are you going?' the peasant said, staring at the youth with rheumy little eyes of fascinated curiosity

'Orleans'

'How?' the peasant asked with a puzzled look on his face.

'Orleans'

'I do not understand,' the peasant said

'Orleans! Orleans!' the girl shouted in a furious tone

'The gentleman says he is going to Orleans'

'Ah!' the peasant cried with an air of sudden illumination  
'Orleans!'

It seemed to the youth that he had said the word just the same way the peasant said it, but he repeated again

'Yes, Orleans'

'He is going to Orleans,' the peasant said, turning to his wife

'Ah-h!' she cried knowingly, with a great air of illumination, then both fell silent, and began to stare at the youth with curious eyes again

'What region are you from?' the peasant asked presently, still intent and puzzled, staring at him with his small eyes

'How's that? I don't understand?'

'I say—what region are you from?'

'The gentleman is not French!' the girl shouted, as if exasperated by their stupidity. 'He is a foreigner Can't you see that?'

'Ah-h!' the peasant cried, after a moment, with an air of astounded enlightenment Then turning to his wife he said briefly, 'He is not French. He is a stranger.'

'Ah-h!'

And then they both turned their small round eyes on him and regarded him with a fixed, animal-like attentiveness

'From what country are you?' the peasant asked presently.  
'What are you?'

'I am an American'

'Ah-h! An American. . . He is an American,' he said, turning to his wife.

'Ah-h!'

The girl made an impatient movement, and continued to stare sullenly out the window.

Then the peasant, with the intent curiosity of an animal, began to examine his companion carefully from head to foot. He looked at his shoes, his clothes, his overcoat, and finally lifted his eyes to stare at the young man's valise on the rack above his head. He nudged his wife and pointed to the valise.

'That's good stuff, eh?' he said in a low voice. 'It's real leather.'

'Yes, it's good, that.'

And both of them looked at the valise for some time and then turned their curious gaze upon the youth again. He offered the peasant another cigarette, and the old man took one, thanking him.

'It's very fine, this,' he said, indicating the cigarette. 'That costs dear, eh?'

'Six francs.'

'Ah-h! . . . That's very dear,' and he began to look at the cigarette with increased respect.

'Why are you going to Orleans?' he asked presently. 'Do you know someone there?'

'No, I am just going there to see the town.'

'How?' The peasant blinked at him uncomprehendingly. 'You have business there?'

'No. I am going just to visit—to see the place.'

'How?' the peasant said stupidly in a moment, looking at him. 'I do not understand.'

'The gentleman says he is going to see the town,' the girl broke in furiously. 'Can't you understand anything?'

'I do not understand what he is saying,' the old man said to her. 'He does not speak French.'

'He speaks very well,' the girl said angrily. 'I understand him very well. It is you who are stupid—that's all.'

The peasant was silent for some time now, puffing at his cigarette and looking at the young man with friendly eyes.

'America is very large—eh?' he said at length—making a wide gesture with his hands.

'Yes, it is very large Much larger than France'

'How?' the peasant said again with a puzzled, patient look 'I do not understand.'

'He says America is much larger than France,' the girl cried in an exasperated tone 'I understand all he says'

Then for several minutes, there was an awkward silence nothing was said The peasant smoked his cigarette, seemed on the point of speaking several times, looked bewildered and said nothing Outside, rain had begun to fall in long slanting lines across the fields, and beyond, in the grey blown sky, there was a milky radiance where the sun should be, as if it were trying to break through When the peasant saw this, he brightened, and leaning forward to the young man in a friendly manner, he tapped him on the knee with one of his great stiff fingers, and then pointing toward the sun, he said very slowly and distinctly, as one might instruct a child:

'Le so-leil'

And the young man obediently repeated the word as the peasant had said it.

'Le so-leil.'

The old man and his wife beamed delightedly and nodded their approval, saying, 'Yes Yes Good. Very good' Turning to his wife for confirmation the old man said.

'He said it very well, didn't he?'

'But, yes! It was perfect!'

Then pointing to the rain, and making a down-slanting movement with his great hands, he said again, very slowly and patiently

'La pluie'

'La pluie,' the young man repeated dutifully, and the peasant nodded vigorously, saying.

'Good, good You are speaking very well In a little time you will speak good French.' Then pointing to the fields outside the train, he said gently

'La terre'

'La terre,' the young man answered.

'I tell you,' the girl cried angrily from her seat by the window, 'he knows all these words. He speaks French very well. You are too stupid to understand him—that is all.'

The old man made no reply to her, but sat looking at the young man with a kind, approving face. Then more rapidly than before, and in succession, he pointed to the sun, the rain, the earth, saying:

'Le so-leil . . . la pluie . . . la terre.'

The young man repeated the words after him, and the peasant nodded with satisfaction. Then for a long time no one spoke, there was no sound except for the uneven ratchet-clack of the little train, and the girl continued to look sullenly out the window. Outside, the rain fell across the fertile fields in long slanting lines.

Late in the afternoon, the train stopped at a little station, and everyone rose to get out. This was as far as the train went: to reach Orleans it was necessary to change to another train.

The peasant, his wife and his daughter collected their bundles, and got out of the train. On another track, another little train was waiting, and the peasant pointed to this with his great stiff finger, and said to the young man:

'Orleans. That's your train there.'

The youth thanked him, and gave the old man the remainder of the package of cigarettes. The peasant thanked him effusively and before they parted he pointed again rapidly toward the sun, the rain, and the earth, saying with a kind and friendly smile:

'Le so-leil . . . la pluie . . . la terre.'

And the young man nodded to show that he understood, repeated what the old man had said. And the peasant shook his head with vigorous approval, saying:

'Yes, yes. It's very good. You will learn fast.'

At these words, the girl, who with the same sullen, aloof, and ashamed look had walked on ahead of her parents, now turned, and cried out in a furious and exasperated tone:

'I tell you, the gentleman knows all that! . . . Will you

leave him alone now! . You are only making a fool of yourself!

But the old man and old woman paid no attention to her, but stood looking at the young man with a friendly smile, and shook hands warmly and cordially with him as he said good-bye

Then he walked on across the tracks and got up into a compartment of the other train. When he looked out the window again, the peasant and his wife were standing on the platform looking toward him with kind and eager looks on their old faces. When the peasant caught his eye, he pointed his great finger toward the sun again, and called out

'Le so-leil'

'Le so-leil,' the young man answered

'Yes, yes!' the old man shouted, with a laugh. 'It's very good.'

Then the daughter looked toward the young man sullenly, gave a short and impatient laugh of exasperation, and turned angrily away. The train began to move, then, but the old man and woman stood looking after him as long as they could. He waved to them, and the old man waved his great hand in answer, and, laughing, pointed toward the sun. And the young man nodded his head, and shouted, to show that he had understood. Meanwhile, the girl had turned her back with an angry shrug and was walking away around the station.

Then they were lost from sight, the train swiftly left the little town behind, and now there was nothing but the fields, the earth, the smoky and mysterious distances. The rain fell steadily.



# A List of Novels

arranged under authors' names, and  
chosen from the fiction published by  
Jonathan Cape

## ANDREWS, ANDREW

### THIS CLEANER WIND

A first-rate sea-story salvage, wrecks and romance in Channel waters to-day

### MARTIN LETHBRIDGE

The battle between an engineer and a Central American swamp, a novel of romantic action

### THE LAST CARGO

Present day smuggling 'a brilliant description of the coastwise trade of Breton fishing villages' *News-Chronicle*

## BATES, H E

### THE TWO SISTERS

'Jenny, Jessie and Michael, figures of eternal youth, shown with all their tumultuous passionate emotions, in a beautiful mirror'

EDWARD GARNETT

### CATHLINE FOSTER

The story of a woman whose love is drawn towards her husband's brother, told with consummate artistry

### CHARLOTTE'S ROW

'What strikes one most of all about this book is its extraordinary sense of beauty There is not a false note in the novel'

*Manchester Guardian*

### THE FALLOW LAND

The story of an English farm and those who farmed it between the 'eighties and to-day

### THE POACHER

A picture and a tragedy of English rural life The life story of a poacher

## BROPHY, JOHN

### WATERFRONT

Liverpool life, work in a big department store, the skeleton in a respectable family cupboard

### THE WORLD WENT MAD

A cross-section of English life during the Great War, a living sequence of brief cinematographic scenes

## CALDER-MARSHALL, ARTHUR

### TWO OF A KIND

Two love-affairs, a father's and a daughter's, twenty-five years apart in time, but of equal significance

### ABOUT LEVY

'I urge all those who are interested in the craft of fiction to read this very successful experiment' HAROLD NICOLSON

### AT SEA

The ordeal of a honeymoon couple carried out to sea in a small boat

## CAMBRIDGE, ELIZABETH

### HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

A quiet, charming picture of a country doctor's family (*Chosen by the Book Society*)

### THE SYCAMORE TREE

The story of a man who 'wished to give no trouble', and what happened to his marriage

### SUSAN AND JOANNA

The parallel lives of two girls in a downland country of the Midlands

## CANFIELD, DOROTHY

### THE BRIMMING CUP

Conflict in a woman's heart between domesticity and passion

### HER SON'S WIFE

A mother's struggle against her son's selfishness, and her daughter-in-law's self-indulgence

### THE DEEPENING STREAM

'Her portrait of a young American woman grows into life by a quiet emphasis, and enlarges into a sure picture of American life'

*Manchester Guardian*

### BASQUE PEOPLE

A collection of stories about men and women of the Basque country

### BONFIRE

A young doctor in a small American town, the story of his conflict with his self-sacrificing sister and of his disastrous marriage

## COON, CARLETON S

### FLESH OF THE WILD OX

A chronicle of high valleys and long rifles a story of the Rif by one who has lived among its people

### THE RIFFIAN

Adventure amongst the unconquered Riffians of Morocco, and the story of Ali the Jackal, a great tribesman and rogue

## EDWARDS, HUGH

### SANGORFE

A story of the West Indies as rich in quality as the potent drink that lends the book its name

### ALL NIGHT AT MR STANYHURST'S

'A little masterpiece,' says JAMES AGATE A story of tragic adventure and sentiment set in an exquisite eighteenth-century frame

### CRACK OF DOOM

A story of three generations in the West Indies, and how earthquake and volcano determine their lives and loves

## FRASER, RONALD

### FLOWER PHANTOMS

A strange tale of a girl's merging into the body and experience of a plant

### THE VISTA

The spiritual pilgrimage of a man through a disastrous marriage, to happiness with the woman he loves

### ROSE ANGRY

The story of a woman's heart 'The sustained beauty of the prose is the just expression of beauty in the conception' *Observer*

### THE FLYING DRAPER

The interaction between two worlds made tangible by the flying draper of Pinhoe Hill

### MARRIAGE IN HEAVEN

In the love of man for woman, there lives an 'immortal kind of reality' the story of Adrian and Linet

### TROPICAL WATERS

An exciting and amusing story of love and adventure in South America

### THE NINTH OF JULY

A story of romantic love and jealousy in the glamorous setting of South America

## GREENWOOD, WALTER

### LOVE ON THE DOLE

A novel of life among the unemployed in Salford and Manchester.

'We passionately desire this novel to be read - it is the real thing'

*Manchester Guardian*

### HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

A witty satire on municipal politics in a provincial city

## Hemingway, Ernest

### FIRES

A relentless picture of the post-war American expatriates in Montparnasse (USA Title: *The Sun also Rises*)

### A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Americans on the Italian front, and the poignancy of a personal drama staged against the war background

## HEMINGWAY, ERNEST—*continued*

### TORRENTS OF SPRING

A brilliant pastiche of certain modern novels, written with the author's richest gusto

## HURST, FANNIE

### LUMMOX

The life-story of Bertha, maid-of-all-work

### A PRESIDENT IS BORN

The early life of a man destined to be President of the United States

### FIVE AND TEN

The 'thirteenth richest man in the world', and the strange characters surrounding him

### BACK STREET

The life of a woman who lives in the 'back street' of a rich protector's life

### ANIGRA'S DANCE

The story of Bruno, genius and composer, and of his bohemian household in New York.

## LEWIS, SINCLAIR

### MARTIN ARROWSMITH

The fight of a doctor against shams and hypocrisies in medical science

### THE TRAIL OF THE HAWK

The pioneer days of flying and a man's search for a career

### OUR MR WRENN

A meek little man's astonishing adventures in England

### BABBITT

The book that gave a new word to the language 'One of the greatest novels I have read for a long time' H G WELLS

### MAIN STREET

The soul of small-town America 'A most searching and excellent piece of work' JOHN GALSWORTHY

### THE JOB

The story of one of the army of girls who travel on the New York Elevated every day

### MANTRAP

Two men and a woman brought together in the Canadian North-West

### ELMER GANTRY

The portrait of a profligate revivalist and his ecclesiastical 'racket'

### THE MAN WHO KNEW COOLIDGE

A satirical portrait in the raciest American style, and a delectable pendant to *Babbitt*

### DODSWORTH

An elderly American business man and his wife in England and Europe 'A truly first-rate story' ARNOLD BENNETT

## LEWIS, SINCLAIR—*continued*

### FREE AIR

A garage-mechanic chases a pretty girl in a Rolls-Royce. A two-thousand-mile romance

### ANN VICKERS

An indictment of modern American social conditions, a plea for penal reform, and the portrait of a remarkable woman

### WORK OF ART

The American counterpart of Arnold Bennett's *Imperial Palace* the life story of an hotel-keeper

## LINKLATER, ERIC

### WHITE-MAA'S SAGA

A plain tale of a young man's adventures among medical students and the primitive folk of his native Orkney

### POET'S PUB

A story of wild and lively adventures in the English country-side to-day

### JUAN IN AMERICA

A wandering descendant of the great Don in modern America 'A magnificent frolic.' J B PRIESTLEY (*Chosen by the Book Society*)

### THE MEN OF NESS

A tale of the Vikings told with a rare sense of battle and bravery and the northern seas

### MAGNUS MERRIMAN

The harum-scarum adventures of a young Scot wine, women, politics, farming, whatnot . . .

### RIPENESS IS ALL

Large families are often expensive, but Major Gander left £70,000 to the founder of the largest An uproarious comedy.

## MACPHERSON, IAN

### SHIPPLERD'S CALENDAR

Age and youth waste their strength in rival efforts to the same end a story of Scottish agricultural life.

### LAND OF OUR FATHERS

The passing of the Highland crofter, and the absorption of the land by the sheep-farmers of the South

## MITCHISON, NAOMI

### THE CONQUERED

A novel of Caesar's Gallic wars, with all the sweeping action of a contemporary story

### CLOUD-CUCKOO LAND

Greeks and barbarians in the fifth century B C

### THE CORN KING AND THE SPRING QUEEN

Adventures of war and intrigues of peace against a background of three pagan civilizations.

## MURPHY, BERNADETTE

### AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

An unusual story that strikes far beneath the surface a woman relives her childhood, her mature self a guest in her old home

### THE UNWILLING PLAYER

A play devised by children is staged again twenty years later, but now the players are men and women, and their play is reality

## NICHOLS, BEVERLEY

### CRAZY PAVEMENTS

A satirical picture of the wickedness that lurks in Mayfair!

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J B PRIESTLEY

## O'DONNELL, PEADAR

### ISLANDERS

Peasant life on an island off the coast of Donegal

### ADRIGOOLE

The hopeless struggle for life on the bogs and rocky soil of western Ireland

### THE KNIFE

A story of conflict in the Lagan, where the two races of Ulster meet

### ON THE EDGE OF THE STREAM

The organization of a co-operative store and the fight with the shopkeepers in a small town in Ireland

## O'FAOLÁIN, SEÁN

### A NEST OF SIMPLE FOLK

The lives and deaths of a group of Irish families from the eighteenth century to the Rising of 1916

## PLOMER, WILLIAM

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Young working-class people come into contact with a middle-class family a candid picture of contemporary London life

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### COONARDOO

A moving study of the aboriginals and the whites in contemporary Australia

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The adventures of a travelling circus in Australia

## ROBERTS, ELIZABETH MADOX

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The life, struggles, and loves of a poor white in the Kentucky hills  
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A story of a remote Kentucky farm where small things take on high  
significance

## ROBERTSON, E. ARNOT

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A girl's passion for a plausible, attractive, but dubious young man

### THREE CAME UNARMED

Two boys and a girl, brought up in the jungle, suddenly pitched into  
English provincial society

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The journey of four people, escaping from a plague-stricken ship  
through the Malayan jungle

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A close-up of family life in a Suffolk village, and of small boat sailing  
(*Chosen by the Book Society*)

## WALMSLEY, LEO

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The rivalry of two fishing families in a village on the Yorkshire coast

### PHANTOM LOBSTER

The story of a lobster-fishing village 'it has the qualities of the true  
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An artist's struggle against a hostile Yorkshire village

## WEBB, MARY

### GONE TO EARTH

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'A man is lured into the ancient and mazy dance of madness by the  
heathen spirit of fear' G. K. CHESTERTON

WEBB, MARY—*continued*

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'The essential quality of her writing is primarily a passionate sincerity, this sincerity amounted to genius' REV H R L SHEPPARD

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Mary Webb's posthumous novel of medieval life, and a number of short stories

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Four short novels of England and America, dealing with 'the harsh voice we hear when money talks or hite'.

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A novel that portrays the women of India in clear and sympathetic colours

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The inside of a prison just before an execution a passionate appeal against capital punishment

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The story of a British pioneer and his family in the Middle West

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The experiences of an American prisoner of war in Dartmoor in 1813, his attempted escapes and his wife's courage

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Two country families, united by marriage, find a solution to many difficulties

JENNY WREN

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